

“Quiet Please, it’s a bloody opera”!

How is Tommy a part of the Opera History?

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Martin Nordahl Andersen 2011

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1.0 Overture

1.1 *It's a boy! – Introduction*

My theory about pop music is very simple: it is in pop music and through the experience of pop music performance that we find the theatre of our time. A song isn't popular just by being constructed as a pop song, neither is an audience an audience without a song they connect to – a song needs an audience to make it popular. Likewise, a pop music performance isn't a performance without an audience defining what kind of performance it is.

An audience is in return defined by the songs and pop performances they embrace. The audience and the song/music/performance operate together when they meet, either from the speakers/headset in an audio – theatrical setting or in the concert hall/venue in a real theatrical setting. That meeting between music and the audience has for some years been an overreaching arch in my studies, be it in music or performance studies – and it has had impact on my life as a music consumer, theorist and performer. In other words, I am a keen advocate for live and audio performance-related popular music studies.

In this particular thesis, I will try to explain what impact the music of *Tommy* by British rock band The Who had on a seemingly musically uneducated audience¹ when the album came out in 1969 and how it continues to fascinate music listeners in the contemporary rock world. My first encounter with The Who was not through *Tommy* but the televised *Quadrophenia* concert from Hyde Park in 1996 and needless to say it opened my eyes to a whole new way of taking rock seriously, and at the same time, pumping it full of comedy and dark laughter. The

¹ This thesis is in large parts based on two earlier term papers (see Literature section for more info), written when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Oslo. The reason for combining them is very simple – I recently realized I'd written the same paper twice but in two different research departments with six years passing in between them. They're not the same of course and originate from two very specific yet different events and circumstances. What they share however, is that they are both centered around British rock act The Who and the music from their classic rock album *Tommy*. Method, analytical content and background, however, is vastly different as the papers represent to separated disciplines in art studies. In short, this is an attempt to bring them together as one and see if the two textual approaches were in fact one.

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starting point of this thesis however, originates in real life, untelevised and seemingly unmediated events, relating to my own life as a music consumer and Who-megafan².

The first shall I say, epiphany, happened during the opening chords of "Can't Explain" when I attended a Who show in Tinley Park right outside of Chicago IL in 2002. The band had gone through rough times as their founding member and bassist John Entwistle had died the night before the tour was scheduled to start in Las Vegas two months earlier. I was at the time a student at the department of theatre studies at UiO, and during the semester following my trip to the States we were taught about myths, ancient rituals and religion seen through the eyes of theatre studies. From the books and material presented on the subject the impression was that this was something that belonged to the dark past when people travelled hundreds of miles to a certain religious destination, today exemplified by Muslims and their Mekka pilgrimage.

Seen in this light, the Chicago Who concert was a ritual, an event created by the audience – with a little help from the band - to confirm our definition of ourselves as a crowd who's cultural identity is shaped by the music of The Who. I discovered then and still argue now that there is absolutely no difference between walking four hundred kilometers to kneel in front of a relic than saving up a month's salary to go half around the globe to see your favorite band. The only differences are in the justification and the cultural framework.

In the middle ages people would travel many miles to certain churches and cathedrals around Europe, like the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim Norway where St Olav is buried as part of pilgrimage³. There is evidence that visitors have come from all over Europe and Norway, and even today visitors come in big numbers by boat or train or even, perhaps by the marked trail from Oslo to Trondheim that takes you through the footsteps of the pilgrims. Oslo-Trondheim by car is a seven hours journey (a pit stop included – I recommend the elk-burgers at Elverum). Try to walk that distance and you'll find yourself being on the road for weeks. Going there in ancient times would have been an enormous sacrifice in time, money and effort.

² It never hurts to know who you're dealing with. I have studied music since high school, been playing in various bands with various levels of success, been an actor in an annual Shakespeare summer production, worked as a guitar technician, and will in this year be part of no less than three recording productions, with extensive touring to follow them up. My Who-fan itch has been satisfied with going to nine concerts from 1996 and upwards.

³ See www.nidarosdomen.no for more info

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My journey to Chicago was not as exhausting, but it was nevertheless a huge undertaking. Just getting to the states is expensive for a student, not to mention the rental car, hotels, meals and drink. I could probably have bought a used car or a brand new Gibson Les Paul guitar for the same money that goes down the drain of being on the road.

My point is that I, together with the rest of the audience, made a sacrifice. I willingly and with intent handed in or spent my hard earned money to be able to exclusively enter an arena - or what theatre studies call performance space - where The Who was scheduled to play and perform. I say perform because at the center of my observations was the fact that the people on stage were in fact NOT the Who. It was a collection of musicians that performed the Who as an act, like a cover band but with two surviving members. They acted out a performance based on classic rock music that is now part of our collective cultural heritage, and the physical presence of a such a show reinforces the audience's beliefs in that cultural heritage and time. This is no different from a pilgrim being in the presence of the remains of St. Olav and the physical representation of Christian faith. Well, there is of course the obvious fact that Daltrey and Townshend are still alive, but my point is that what they were evoking (the old band) is long gone.

Theatre and theatrical events, myths and rites was not a thing of the past or other distant cultures – it was happening right here, materializing itself in us and in front of our very eyes. If one allows the recording and popular music performance history into theatre studies, the theatre studies discipline gains an uplifting thrust right away: The people who have shaped our stage art are still alive, and not dead for three-hundred years - we have much more basis for our claims and theories, more texts to read, more books to write, and more shows to attend when reading and analyzing theatre and performance.

I found it ironic that the same people and writers who were shaping theatre studies and calling for a living contemporary theatre were unable to make a connection to the present stage world that was obviously there in front of them: Open any newspaper today and you'll see stage performance photos of Lady Gaga, Green Day, Nelly Furtado or Morrissey. Our every day is filled with characters and personalities acting out roles through music for us to immerse ourselves in. Already, I see myself using theatre studies terms like "characters" and "acting" – the performance studies thrust is never far away when analyzing popular music.

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The second, shall I say, formative incident happened in 2008, and had a different, somewhat unusual birth. It all started when I attended a production of Mozart's *Titus* at the new Norwegian Opera House. I had never seen opera live before and was amazed by the acoustics, performance, staging, and the overall quality of production. Then, right in the middle of the second half, a fire alarm is set off and everyone in the room is escorted outside while the staff investigates. We can go back to our seats fifteen minutes later. To my astonishment, only two thirds of the crowd has returned. One third of the entire room has decided that enough is enough and that Mozart can be Mozart all he wants but that it's time to head home. Not even the expensive tickets leave them with an urge to at least sit out the show like proud Norwegians usually do.

It was sad to watch. The new opera house has since opening in 2008 seen people flock to the ticket office and most nights are sold out. But as that crowd that evening never came back to see who the murderer was, it dawned on me that they perhaps came to see the building and not so much the show in itself. That is ok, by the way, but it doesn't look good when exposed like that on such a night and occasion. What happened was a perfect example of theatre and society politics not mixing too well: Discussions of whether or not Norway should have a new opera house were entirely a discussion about the building, where to place it, and not a discussion about the repertoire.

The first plan was to make use of the old Oslo West train station, but because of political and city planning reasons it was placed slap bang in the heart of a giant traffic machine, catalyzing a gigantic building project in the east part of the city. This has of course, got nothing to do with opera. Opera is an art form that requires a huge building with specified facilities, like acoustics, light and stage technology and it's probably the only stage art born *inside* a building. Theatre was in the middle ages an outdoor event, performing in spaces that would somehow fit. To do this with an opera of the traditional kind is very demanding if not possible.

What some were asking for was a serious debate about how to get people buy tickets – or how to make the house and the stage reflect a need in the audience for opera, just like in the debate discussed above. The debate was and still is relevant and active today as it was two years ago, as the house has faced red budged numbers and negative turnover in addition to the extra costs of adjusting a business and production operation into a new building. Some ticket

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holders want to see the old warhorses like the Mozart repertoire or Wagner. Others might want to see newly composed material with a modern tonality and edge, like the newly written Norwegian opera "Around The World in Eighty Days".

In their defense though, as time has gone by, it must be said that they have since my fire-alarm-night-out done a magnificent and tasteful job in letting popular culture into the opera, and, as irony would have it, a year after writing my thesis, in a rare moment of real academic-to-life irony, I found myself on the opera stage, playing bass for Norwegian pop act Minor Majority as part of a Haiti relief show. Legendary Norwegian rock bands like Seigmenn and deLillos have also done shows at the opera.

My epiphany at the opera that night was not about *who* should be playing on stage, rather *what* and the identification of opera or dramatic musical stage art and the opera genre's role in shaping this identification. I argued that the crowd who left the building that night was in fact an honest group of people, basically telling the opera that this production was pointless. We do not identify. Nice building. We are leaving. It seemed that they treated the opera house as a museum. I then thought of *Tommy*, my background from theatre studies and my recent dabbling with popular music studies. Maybe *Tommy* could work in this building? To use the words of Pete Townshend at the beginning of disc 2 of *Live at Leeds* when introducing the rock opera: *It's an opera isn't it?* The audience was made up by people in the age of 50 + and therefore in the right age for knowing the work and perhaps even having a copy stowed away somewhere. If The Who became popular in the late sixties the audience is still alive and would probably go see it if it was offered as a performance.

Although *Tommy* was labeled "Rock opera" as a bit of a joke, it was perhaps just that – a dramatic body of music that could work as an opera just like the operas it was intended to mock, and that this is a work that opera stages around the world could easily include in their repertoire. The Who played it in European opera buildings when the album was released, and it was a huge success. It is my belief that an opera audience today would be more used to songs than traditional opera as identity vessels for drama, character and meaning – the pop song and the characterization of it has been part of our daily lives for the last sixty years, *Tommy* has been around for 42 years. Including *Tommy* in the opera repertoire naturally requires a rethinking of genre and form and what opera is but without the loss or exclusion of existing opera definitions.

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It was also on that night that I understood the theatre studies dystopia. By that I mean that even though you have a stage, a room, a full house, costumes, music, a good play that has been performed for ages, it's not a recipe for theatre. I must give theatre studies one point for making it clear that theatre is something that happens, a moment or a state of mind that occurs, no matter the technical circumstances or style of performance. I have witnessed this myself as an actor, when I was part of a production of *Othello* in Tønsberg, Norway in 2006. When Cordelia stabs herself in the last scene, the audience laughed out loud, others holding back a big burst of laughter. If an audience laughs when someone dies at the end of a tragedy, chances are you've failed in connecting with the audience, no matter how hard you've worked. It's simply not theatre even though it's labeled theatre and performed as theatre.

This work throws these two stories together: to see if the a rock concert is theatre and as a continuation of this, if the Who's *Tommy* is theatrical work with a dramatic thrust – is really an opera?

1.2 1921 - Task and thesis

In both stories above, I've dealt with my own demand for authenticity in the works and productions I've have seen; "real" opera, the "real" Who, "real" rock opera etc. My demand for authenticity probably comes from my upbringing in the nineties when grunge ruled the world and everybody had to be "real". In that frame of mind, the Who was apparently the perfect band: a band with an image an iconography carefully constructed around this image, but a band that seemed to be able to make up its own rules as it went along

This brings us to the beginning of this thesis, which is the idea that that *Tommy* is an opera in the rock genre with dramatic music, that it is a work made for the stage making its impact in the meeting with a live audience and a work that can be part of the opera repertoire. There are in other words three stages of the album's life and three stages of authenticity I wish to explore.

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The first is the labeling of the album. To call it rock-opera naturally changes how we value, judge and listen the album as opposed to call it a pop album. In here there are three definitions that needs to be sorted out; pop, rock and opera. How the band sold the album is in my opinion crucial to the way the audience listened to it. If we identify with the music of The Who, the choice of genre is part of that shaping. Is it a *real* rock opera? In other words, it is here that the textual reading originates and where our theatrical conception of *Tommy* starts.

This brings us to the second part of this study. It rests on the assumption that it's not enough to have called your album rock opera, it also needs to contain opera or *true* drama. Through an analysis of the song "Christmas" I will try to explain how this music is indeed dramatic music and how an audience, either as listeners or performance participants, are given fully contained musical dramatic markers to connect to characters presented in the song and how these characters are set up against each other through the action of the music. I will also show how the music connects to the rock opera as popular musical text.

That analysis is brought into the third part of the study. Here, I place the song in a live setting to show how the music works in a theatrical context, using performance theory to unlock the mechanisms of rock stage art. I want to explore the rock concert as a ritual, how it's developed or to be more specific: How the audience's command of the specter of authenticity has changed the meaning of the performance. Another feature in this section will be to see if this kind of performance is in any way representative of a theatre theory/staging theory. This will be presented telling two stories, one for the original performance, and one based on a performance of *Tommy* by Who vocalist Roger Daltrey in London 2011.

In summing up I therefore ask *in what ways is Tommy part of the Opera history?* I will try to show that Tommy is the natural continuation of the development of the art of opera, despite the fact that the label "rock-opera" was a mock genre description invented in the rock sphere. One underlying key question is whether our reading of *Tommy* as a rock opera is set up by the labeling or the actual musical contents, and what that might be.

The reasons for writing about *Tommy* in this way are many. There is of course the obvious personal reason which is to figure out why this music was so important to me when I first heard it as a teenager some thirty years after its initial release. But more importantly I write

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this to those trying to figure out what pop music is and how to explain it. What is the album's role in the continuing re - contextualization of our understanding of The Who?

I hope that this analysis will give musicians new tools to their writing and pop music students a better understanding of what a record is in relation to a live performance. To combine theatre and pop music studies have, as said earlier, been a part of my studies since 2002 and I see no reason not to bring that into this thesis.

Lastly there's The Who themselves and their unexplainable and almost total absence from any major work on popular music studies of any significance. If they are mentioned, it's usually in context with "My Generation" – not wrong per se, but despite its explosive sonic values or impact on arrival, it doesn't represent The Who or what The Who changed in pop history. *My Generation*⁴ is in my opinion mostly notable for its lyrics and vocal performance, and not so much the music it represents. A powerful tune and a fantastic recording for its day, it bears no marks of a Who signature musical fundament, something they definitely cemented with *Tommy*.

As a formative group of pop and rock history they deserve better exposure in the world of popular music studies because they paved the way and defined what we today take for granted in pop music. They also operated in and became famous in a time when pop music got very little exposure compared to today, so their fame and success must be looked at from other angles than let's say Madonna, an artist with more analytical books written about her than the number of CDs with her music. My work on The Who is anchored in the understanding that there was popular music before MTV and that not all popular music can be understood by reviewing music videos. Visual recordings of this band reveal that they performed for the room, not the cameras.

With The Who there is, despite this absence in popular music studies, surprisingly much information to draw from when looking into the world of The Who. We also have the unusual luxury to study their side of the microphone as Pete Townshend is more that open about his

⁴ As heard on The Who (2002): *My Generation Deluxe Edition*, 088 112 926-2 Chronicles, Universal Music Company. Originally released in 1965 in UK as Lat 8616 Brunswick records

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projects. Last time this happened with any interest to popular music studies was in 2009⁵ in connection with a stage adaption of his other rock opera *Quadrophenia*. He managed to cram more info about pop music into a few pages than most writers in the standard curriculum needs books to explain.

I know of no other artist with this direction of interest, or willingness towards the study of popular music. This aspect of the band begs to be part of popular music studies and deserves consideration and exposure when writing about the band. This thesis will try to show how to use his shared knowledge about music and art, and The Who's significance in post war society.

In reference to popular music and theatre studies, there are many reasons for choosing *Tommy* as my subject matter as opposed to the much acclaimed *Quadrophenia*⁶ and *Who's Next*⁷, both considered superior albums by critics and fans alike. *Tommy* was the album that skyrocketed the band's career. It took The Who from being an underground live act to million selling album artist within the course of a year making it the vessel that carried The Who from "unpopular" to "popular", right in to the moment which presents us with what I think is the core question in popular music studies: why is this music popular?

As I see it, the continuing success of *Tommy* is a prime example of a musical and theatrical work connecting and finding an audience, thus bringing it into the theatre/performance studies debate mentioned above. We are not talking about a small theatre group experimenting for an initiated, academic audience – *Tommy* was a massive global success in the demography of the casual record buyer. I'm also intrigued by the fact that with this record, everything is wrong: It sounds muddy, cobbled together, long songs, short songs, "sick" lyrics, weird cover, horns that are slightly out of key, bad time keeping and so on. Hardly a recipe for massive success, but that's the album the audience wanted. The later album *It's Hard*⁸ was also a smash hit but largely due to a Who - renaissance in the early eighties, pushed forward by two films and a punk movement hailing The Who as their heroes.

⁵ Jackson, James: *Pete Townshend on Quadrophenia, touring with The Who and the Mod revival*, online (accessed 05.05.2009) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/music/article2417436.ece>

⁶ The Who (1996): *Quadrophenia*, 531 971-2 Polydor Ltd, originally released as in 1973 Track 2657 013

⁷ The Who (2003): *Who's Next Deluxe Edition*, 088 113 056-2 Chronicles, Universal Music Company, originally released in 1971 as Track 2408 102.

⁸ The Who (1997): *It's Hard*, 537 696-2, Polydor, originally released in 1982 as Polydor WHOD 5066

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The success of *It's Hard* then, it not a "mystery", and can easily be explained through public demand and previous success. In other words, it's an explanation that belongs in media studies. It was certainly not a success based on the music. *It's Hard* it probably the worst album any band of The Who scale has ever produced; there's no urgency or energy and listening to it is a draining affair. Discussions rage whether or not this is a good album. The reissue from 1997 certainly sounds better than the original LP and made the album less terrible, but there's no denying the lack of substance and feel from a band previously making extraordinary albums.

The success of *Tommy* doesn't have that pattern although they were helped by an appearance at Woodstock and the subsequent movie pulled from the performance. But there were a lot of performers and bands on that festival, others not having the same success or impact as The Who had with *Tommy*. The album came seemingly out of nowhere and managed to convince an audience that was thought to be finished with The Who. It is my belief that the success of *Tommy* was down to the musical content, the actual sounds and music that comes out of your speaker or head set and not so much by the media thrust it obviously gained through the Woodstock hoopla.

I will try to explain the music of *Tommy* by choosing a song not played that often nowadays, but featured in the live set The Who played promoting the album. The song is called "Christmas" and I chose this song simply because it contains all elements featured on the album crammed into one composition.

1.3 Amazing Journey: Approaching musical analysis

I started this thesis by defining my theory about pop music and how I attach it to theatre by approaching it through the eyes and ears of performance. This gives us an idea of the textual approach to The Who and *Tommy*, but the statement also begs an explanation of how I approach the actual music. The analytical background is panning back and forth in two approaches to "Christmas": popular music studies, which is the interdisciplinary study of

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popular music, in my case encompasses theatre/performance studies. In addition I draw on aspects of popular musicology, a sub-discipline of musicology and/or popular music studies that deals with criticism and analysis of the music itself - what is going on in the music - without ignoring social or cultural context⁹.

The latter perspective ("what is going on in the music") is very important to me and probably comes from my background as a musician, performer, songwriter and my belief that popular music *has music in it*: melody, tonality, chord, chord changes, modulation, instrumentation, arrangements etc. and *that it should be analyzed as music*. To be able to fully understand why some music affects us more than other music (as is my basis for analyzing popular music in the first place), these elements must, as I see it, be grasped in one way or the other. Many of one's favorite pop/rock musicians may not be trained in theory although they play instruments constructed around western art music tonality, and usually play music that fits that tonality and theory. The thread that runs through popular studies study of music is an awareness of the contradictory nature of the formalist analytical language when transformed to popular music analysis: What it describes is only one dimension of what constitute content.

Without a full understanding of the musical text, we will not be satisfactory able to connect the text to other texts; by this I mean that the interdisciplinary nature of our understanding and analysis of popular music will go astray. In reference to this thesis, I won't be able to argue for *Tommy* as a body of dramatic music - thus reading it as a rock opera, and as such relocating its musical-political status – unless I prove what is going on in the music makes it dramatic, and what makes it stand out from music that is not dramatic. When this is established I can attach the theatre/performance theory thus panning the analysis into popular music studies.

So how do we approach the music? In his book *Studying Popular Music* Richard Middleton argues that pop music is understood as a web of "primary" and "secondary" signifiers¹⁰.

David Brackett builds on this to develop his theories about the connections between these signifiers which he calls "codes"¹¹. The reason for this is that "*focusing purely on relational aspects of every signifier to every signified leaves us with no way of interpreting the resulting*

⁹ Scott Derek: *Introduction* in Scott, Derek(ed): *The Ashgate research companion to Popular Musicology*, 2009, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited p 2

¹⁰ Middleton, Richard: *Studying Popular Music*, 1990, Milton Keynes: Open University Press p 220

¹¹ Brackett, David: *Interpreting Popular Music*, 2000, Los Angeles: University of California Press p 12

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*sign*¹². He follows this with arguing that a code must be received and that the reception of a code is based on competence in the listener.

The majority of music listeners or music consumers have little or no grasp of the technical aspects of the music and therefore falls into the competence level of the *general codes*¹³. I have many friends being highly selective in their tastes when it comes to music, and in most cases they like the music despite not knowing the technicality of the music. In other words: The untrained ear may not be aware of everything that's going on in the music, *but there IS something going on in the music*: it is therefore my job as a popular musicologist to explain just that: what the listener hears and why i.e. what lies behind the general codes. The "what is going on in the music", together with the sound of the music, in popular musicology often a track of an album, is what constitutes the object of analysis.

Then there's the organization and shaping of that information to be able to say something useful as a study in the field of musicology. Middleton writes that "*we need to find ways of bringing the patterns created in the sounds themselves into the foreground, without as a consequence retreating into an inappropriate formalism*"¹⁴.

The pitfalls of classical formalistic analysis when looking at pop music are many, as the resulting analysis will most likely be unsatisfying and speculative – and with good reason: there's a lot of information lost in the vocabulary. Middleton has summed up these problems as follows; i) inappropriate or loaded terminology, ii) skewed focus, iii) Notational centricity, iv) an idealized image of the work (abstractionism) and v) monologic listening¹⁵. As I see it these point only constitutes real problems when used exclusively in describing popular music object. A case in point: When analyzing and explain Jimi Hendrix' version of "Star Spangled Banner" one might argue that it would seem useless to look at a note-for-note transcription of what he's playing.

¹² Brackett 2000: 11

¹³ Brackett 2000: 12

¹⁴ Middleton, Richard: *Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap* in Middleton (Ed): *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, 2000, Oxford: Oxford University Press p 104

¹⁵ Middleton, Richard: *Introduction: Locating the Popular Musical Text* in Middleton (Ed): *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, 2000, Oxford: Oxford University Press p 4

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Or would it? It's important to me that the analytical pendulum isn't swinging too far in the opposite direction of an analysis of music: We are after all studying music. Is Hendrix's reworking shocking on grounds of the sound? Is it the choice of strings? Is it his deconstruction of the melody and form? My answer would be that it is all elements mentioned above and that we must be allowed any means and tools available to understand them in an analytical content, a note-for-note transcription not excluded.

The solution of the music-linguistic problem is that the description of "what is going on in the music" must always be linked to the actual sound of the music described: together they form what Allan Moore calls the primary text¹⁶ which is the sounds themselves.

My "primary text for" this thesis is the original recording of the song "Christmas", and my analytical task is simply to try to describe what's coming out of the speakers, both musical and nonmusical elements, such as lyrics and textures. This is what would meet the listener, and ANY listener at that – prepared or unprepared, trained or untrained, musician or non-musician. The analytical tool which seems to establish a connection to this approach is Allan Moore's concept of the "sound box"¹⁷

*"within which the musical performance takes place. This model posits a three-dimensional space, wherein the potential locations of all instrumental forces can be plotted"*¹⁸

And it is in the sound box where numerous scholars of popular music find their "object" of study. As Hawkins puts it:

*"it is through their arrangements within the recorded audio space (...) that stylistic and technical codes are blended into the compositional design. Occupying a critical sphere of assimilation, the sound-box forms the prime site for music analytic excavation, space where codes interconnect to give rise to musical effects and gestures"*¹⁹

To me, Moore's sound-box deals with the theatricality of the produced sound, which again brings me to the start of the thesis where I proposed an understanding of pop music as

¹⁶ Moore, Allan: *Rock: The Primary Text – Developing a Musicology of Rock – 2nd edn.* 2001, Aldershot; Ashgate Publishing Limited p 1

¹⁷ Moore, Allan: *The Sound of Popular Music: Where are we?*, 2005, online (accessed 24.10.11)
<http://charm.cchcdn.net/redist/pdf/s1Moore.pdf>, University of Surrey

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Hawkins 2002: 10

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"theatre". The sound-box could be called "audio theater" in which the virtual musical performance takes place making use of "the fourth wall" principle so important in realistic theatre, the direction in which Ibsen and Strindberg wrote their plays.

Hawkins, in and further from the quote above, builds on this to develop a work that deals with the interaction of the sound-box text with other texts both in listening and in reading processes²⁰. Through the listening process he suggests that these text would include one's own musical training or competence, knowledge about music history and the song's place in music history. As for the reading process this would include setting up the sound-box musical analysis up against or under other cultural studies disciplines or readings.

In reference to this, my study of the music of the song "Christmas" is through the dialogic relationship between the song as it appears from the speakers and music/performance theory, between *Tommy* being and opera and not being one. My analysis of the music, uses a language often connected to that of the classical music analysis. This again, comes from my background as a musician, trained and drilled in classical notation, and works on a simple premise: it's a language everybody can understand and it's a language no longer caught up in music-political value discussions.

As a result, the musical genre hierarchy (that has for a long held court in the academic world) is waning and no longer in charge. Because of this we can broaden our grasp and selection of terminologies when talking about and analyzing popular music. The classical music canon was very much the focus when I first enrolled in the University in Oslo ten years ago, but this has since changed, and the popular music is now as much part of the center of the music analysis whirlpool.

When the primary musical text in the sound box is established, I can continue the discussions about what constitutes meaning in and from the music using the sound-box theory and further, discuss the effect this has in a live setting. In other words, I'm embarking on a similar analytical journey as Hawkins with his pop score, that is reading the recording as a dialog between musical text with and the context with the added theatre theory expedition of finding

²⁰ Hawkins, Stan: *Settling the Pop Score, Pop texts and identity politics*, 2002, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited p 23

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out what happens when the pop score manifests itself, between artist and the audience, in real time.

A great example of the live meeting like the one I described in the introduction is again from real life experience: When The Who band played the Roskilde festival in 2007 they performed for a crowd of 60 000, many of whom had never seen them before let alone heard any of the music. Most people had probably heard about them and heard one or two early singles, like My Generation. The band had only four days before played the greatest show I've ever seen, so I was naturally jacked up to see them. Others around me were not so enthusiastic but stayed to see them out of pure curiosity. On that tour, as an encore, they played a selection of songs from Tommy: Pinball Wizard, Amazing Journey, Sparks and See Me Feel Me/Listening To You. When the band hit the last note on that last song, one of the men around me turned around and shouted "Holy Shit!" as if he had heard the best music of his life. He was truly in a state of shock. I've never seen anything like it.

This situation, together with the other episodes told at the beginning of the thesis opened my eyes to a way of looking at rock and music, that people actually listen with their ears, and that old ways of analyzing music can tell us something about new music the way a sociological take on popular music can never achieve: In his reaction, I was taken back to when I was eighteen, when I first heard the band, on a cassette of Tommy. I first thought it was weird and strange, but the album has since grown on me turning into the only album of the bands discography that is impossible to put away. His reaction to that show was without doubt based on his contextual knowledge of The Who or about *Tommy's* history, legacy, cover art, production, videos or radio play, nationality, language, nineties irony, MTV, the musical hierarchy, Napster or the history of The Who to mention a few contexts you can throw into experiencing such an event. But his contextual reaction was nevertheless grounded in their relationship with what the band played: On that night he heard that there was something going on in the music.

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

1.4 Sparks: Locating the popular music/theatre studies text

Even though I shall look closely at Christmas and how it is constructed and produced, my reading of popular music is as previously mentioned deeply rooted in performance and ritual theory and very much based on the writings of theatre theorists. In other words, the popular musical text, or how I read pop music is through theatre and performance.

Where does this connection come from? Practically, it was a result of music and theatre studies sharing the same building at the university in Oslo²¹. As a result of feeling that popular music was not taken seriously enough at the music department, I switched to theatre studies instead, to dig into my other passion; theatre. It was here I discovered that popular music studies could be considered a sub-discipline of theatre studies, and performance studies in particular.

One immediate problem I see with the selection of popular music analysis objects so far is the almost total lack of focus on the pop and rock stage history and stage performance.

Documents from live events, such as my CD I have from the 2002 Tinley Park show²², are rarely taken into consideration as basis for textual analysis. This doesn't have to be a problem and judging by the absence of such material in the popular music studies canon it would seem that we will do fine without.

As a long time concert and live performer, it is my opinion that this way of reading and identifying pop music is unsatisfying and somewhat inaccurate: The pop concert has been, and still is, a parallel art form to the recorded studio pop and must be taken into consideration when analyzing pop music.

Why I came to my conclusion about popular music and theatre studies can be looked at from two angles. First, there's theatre studies' and the dystopian view often presented in theatre studies literature. The main frustration or occupation in the theatre studies, and indeed in the

²¹ Theatre studies has now sadly moved and students can no longer make this switch as naturally as the previously could.

²² The Who (2002): *Live Tinley Park, Illinois August 24, 2002*, www.themusic.com

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theatre studies literature, is the way the theatre has let its audience down, confining itself in the theatre building, shying away from the culture the theatre belongs to. The selection of repertoire does not reflect or challenge our times, nor is the theatre taking in enough new plays. New playwrights are largely overlooked and that it's getting worse and worse every year.

The works by Antonin Artaud²³ or Peter Brook²⁴ describe in clear words that the western culture is neglecting the theatre and that the theatre is neglecting its general audience or simply being unable to find an audience at all. Even worse for some, the theatre exists only as national, government funded institutions (like in Norway and most European countries), and that this has prevented the theatre and the audience to evolve together, and reflect each other like they did in the past such as in Elizabethan London where the Globe Theatre provided the citizens with a mirror to their existence.

One work on theatre history *Teatrets Historie I Europa 1-3*, written by Jon Nygaard²⁵ ends in a pessimistic tone, describing a dark future for the theatre almost with an "end of the world" scenario. He claims that the modern and recent attempts to take the theatre out of the confinements of the theatre building, have only made matters worse, as it more demonstrates the gap between stage and seat, rather than filling it. Theatre groups here in Norway producing plays in the style and philosophy of Artaud for example, have had artistic success, but one cannot say that there's been a rush to the box office. When studying theatre back then, I got the impression that theatre was a dead art form.

Ironically, I felt that Nygaards method for identifying theatrical events and reading of theatre history was a truly great one and is in fact the basis of my understanding of pop music as a stage art. I was however, disappointed with his account of the current situation, or at least the situation for the theatre in the last forty years. Even though theatre studies books, including his own account of the European theatre history, stress a vast variety of style and content in the history of the theatre, none of them, not even by recent writers, were able to take the pop

²³ See Bentley, Eric (Ed): *The Theory of The Modern Stage*, 1992: London Penguin Books Ltd p 51-79 for a discussion of his writings.

²⁴ Most notably his critique classic "The Empty Space" from 1968: Brook, Peter: *The Empty Space*, 2008, London: Penguin Books Ltd.

²⁵ Nygaard, Jon: *Teatrets Historie I Europa Del 1-3*, 1996: Østfold trykkeri: Spillerompart 3 p 222-224 "Er teatret "døende"? 1989-2000"

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concert into consideration when telling the story of the theatre in the last 60 years. The pop concert gathers everything from huge crowds to just mom and dad, to watch five or six people on stage pretend to something that they're not.

Instead the theatre studies student are presented with what I feel is bizarre examples of acting styles and directorial methods, none of which a reader from the western civilization can identify with. So a Norwegian audience can't know the true meaning of Hamlet because they missed a puppet - production in Soviet in 67? One of Brooks' heroes is Jerzy Grotowski who introduced techniques of playing what Brook calls "Holy theatre" to a limited total audience of 30 attendants for each performance – in Poland!²⁶

Jon Nygaards *Teatrets historie I Europa* is largely based on a holistic view, almost to the point of being too holistic, by which I mean that I learned a lot of the interplay between theatre and society, but very little about actual theatre techniques and methods.

But the inclusion of other forms of performances doesn't solve the theatre problem, mainly because it describes situations that are too far from our daily life as culture consumers or events that we never would have attended. A production of Richard III in Budapest 1986 you say? Socialistic plays from the Soviet? Hamlet in London 1599? Where's the ticket booth? In these examples we are faced with an obvious theatre study problem, that what we are analyzing doesn't exist. We therefore look to the past and in available documentation. In my case I had the fortune of having the entire Who concert on CD, enabling me to sit down and re-imagine the show.

That night and that show belong purely to the people who were there, bootlegs and official recordings aside. The live recording I had from the show was nothing but that – an audio representation of the sound at the performance. It was a document that in the future can be used as a performance map, a script if you will, for future performances. In my studies I drew comparisons to Viking stone carvings and their role as performance maps²⁷ and, for instance, the manuscript of a Shakespeare play. There are no instructions other than the text itself. Same thing with the live recording – it doesn't tell the whole story, but in not doing so it opens up for others to retell the story.

²⁶ Brooks 2008: 66

²⁷ The course concentrated on Nordic culture and ritual. See <http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ikos/TEA2112/index.xml> for more info.

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The live recordings together with video and photo documents also play a vital part in teaching audience behavior. We know from a video or a photo collection how to behave as a concertgoer at such an event. In any case it's an event that's being passed down as tradition and we use those documents and texts as guidelines and maps for how we are going to act out those performances in the future.

A theatrical experience cannot be bought for money, captured or frozen – it is locked in time and three dimensions. That, however, doesn't mean that it in retrospect cannot be analyzed as a recording - it's just as hard to talk about as love or music or any kind of individual experience.

Theatre studies, in a cultural studies context, have had to remove and distance themselves from literature studies. The solution is to focus on the performance and performativity, theatricality and other factors that can be applied to an analysis of a *live performance*, and not so much on the book of a performance. Reading *Hamlet* is not the same as seeing it in the theatre, alive in front of you. In other words, theatre studies are treating the actual performance as their main study object, just like I did when I wrote about the concert in 2002. So how does this connect to popular music studies?

The other angle in the theatre studies/performance/popular music studies merge is the popular music and popular music studies as currently represented. Most of the artists that make up your record collection have started out on the underground scene, first making impact and headlines as live artists on a stage. Most pop bands these days are taking the live setting into consideration when they construct their image, sometimes making music that fit the arena more than it would fit the headset. This is nothing new off course, American rock band Kiss is the greatest example of this phenomenon. Too rock and roll to be taken seriously as theatrical performers and too theatrical to be taken seriously as a rock and roll band. Their records are good at best, but they were never a studio band. Kiss got their energy, audience momentum as a live band. Other recent bands would be The Xx's, La Roux, Florence + The Machine, Muse, to name a couple.

There could be argued though, that the live history of pop is a secondary source of information. Beatles never had a live history that could explain their success as recording artists and is an example of an act that is hard to fit into a live history setting. In fact their

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shows was merely promotion events rather than concerts, at least compared to what we expect today. They even stopped touring halfway into their career. But in a popular cultural context, the individual members of the band acted out characters or represented an idea of a character. To clarify: Behind the "Paul McCartney" we all know and love as the Beatle member is the private Paul McCartney, a man whom we've probably never seen or heard outside of his performance of his band and solo career character.

The popular music studies has for a long time been occupied with the aspects and construction of identity and authenticity in pop music²⁸. From this I derive that, in the context of popular music, "construction" is "performance" meaning that a construction of authenticity is the same as performing authenticity²⁹. That aspect of popular music studies is located in performance studies, extending the theoretical range in which these constructions can be analyzed.

To sum up for a moment, my argument is that the rock concert is the natural continuation of the theatre and performance history, constructed around an audience who in return got to see themselves reflected from the stage performance in the way a Shakespeare play did in the Elizabethan London. The theatre isn't dead. It found a new language, a new vehicle for dramatization and character projection: *the pop song*.

I tend to look at theatre history with a holistic view, as I believe the theatre is strongly connected to and defined by the society and audience it is created by. That is not to say that we should not look at the theatre art, it's just that in this case, I feel that it would be insufficient to write about the success of Tommy without mentioning the baby-boomers, postwar Europe, the political backdrop of the sixties and the emergence of the rock concert as a medium, or performance space.

A good recent example is Lady Gaga, whose success is based around the western culture and our need and focus on fame and celebrities. Take her to let's say Papa New Guinea and she couldn't be arrested. Likewise, Mali artist Bassekou Kouyate will never find an audience in

²⁸ See Moore, Allan: *Authenticity as Authentication*, 2002, online (accessed 24.10.11)
<http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/1958/1/fulltext.pdf>, Cambridge University Press

²⁹ See Hawkins 2009 chapter 3 – "Virtual insanity or the "Real thing"? on the performance of dandyism and authenticity.

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our world with the exception of a handful of people devoted to world music³⁰, as the majority of the music audience simply don't understand the musical language, sounds, instruments and words³¹, leaving them with just the sound, which is rarely enough for an audience. We need markers and codes to connect us to the music.

German electro quartet Kraftwerk is another example of a group that is impossible to look at without understanding their background and, like The Who, a group that is today somewhat forgotten in the mainstream music picture. This is because the backdrop has changed, not the music. The music hasn't changed, but our receptive background has been updated. Germany is today an integrated part of European life and politics, trade and cultural exchange in a way they were not in the late sixties and early seventies when Kraftwerk arrived. Likewise, The Who made music for the first postwar generation, the first batch of teenagers, thus making music for a specific moment in music history that is hard to understand today when everybody has been a teenager.

To sum up: the score of a pop record can be looked at as a performance map for a live setting, in this case a rock concert. When analyzing "Christmas" I will pay attention to what it is in the music that would create drama and, later in the thesis, demonstrate how this "map" translates to the real performance experience using live audio recordings of various Who shows.

This study can be seen as an extension of the work on glam rock by Philips Auslander³², in the way that we both carry the torch in bringing theatre and performance studies into popular music studies. Presenting his work as an addition to popular music studies he focuses on the musician as a performer and how gestures of performance create meaning. This is where I pick up the gauntlet: In this thesis I shall look closely at how these gestures are contextualized in a

³⁰ There are of course, exceptions to this rule as Mali group Tinariwen has recently enjoyed massive success in Europe and the States. This is in large part due to their history and mythology (learned to play electric guitar in a refugee camp) and playing Fender and Gibson guitars, instruments not normally associated with African musicians, providing a western audience with markers to recognize.

³¹ This is not a problem as large parts of Europeans don't have English as their first language. For example, it is unlikely that it was the lyrics that propelled the success of the Beatles in mid-sixties Norway.

³² As described in Auslander, Philip: *Introduction* in Auslander, Philip: *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular music*, 2006 online (accessed 24.10.11) <http://press.umich.edu/pdf/0472098683-intro.pdf>, The University of Michigan Press

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ritual "doing" setting as I believe meanings of gesture will be different from that in a recorded setting, be it film or television.

I must here stress that this does not, as I see it, fall under the umbrella of audiovisual analysis *per se*, as the basis of analysis in theatre studies comes not from the interaction between music and image, rather from using the visual material as sources of information to the analysis of bygone theatrical events.



The Who in 2006

1.5 Eyesight to The Blind: Literature and recordings

As my primary texts there are the recordings. I was introduced to The Who in the mid - nineties during the Polydor reissue program, and so the albums to me became contemporary as they came out right in the middle of an authenticity surge in the rock world that boasted Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Motorpsycho, Smashing Pumpkins to mention a few. As The Who's sound was idealized in that era, they sounded not dated, but remarkably forwardly, especially with their later albums such as *Who's Next* and *Quadrophenia*. The idealization of production values from the seventies is to some degree still with us in rock production, which is perhaps what keeps The Who seem relevant after all these years. *Tommy* is an exception to this rule. It sounds dated (see analysis of Christmas below)

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My listening relationship with them though, is not through the originally released albums but the remixes and remasterings. The reissue of *Tommy* from 1996³³ is a fantastic version and I highly recommend it for anyone interested in rock music. It has tight sound and good levels all the way through. However, it is remixed and is therefore not a source when describing the music when it came out. The original mix was vastly different, as it had more split stereo and louder vocals. The remix from 96 "fixed" all of those problems, but were reinstated on the 2003 Deluxe Edition³⁴, produced by Townshend himself. For someone used to listening to the remix this was a bit of a shock and I must say that with modern ears, the remix wins any day. Split stereo in particular, is hard to listen to with ear-buds. I also use a German Polydor vinyl³⁵ original mix pressing as a reference³⁶

With live material from the *Tommy* tour, there's plenty to choose from. In late 2010, the *Live at Leeds* record was released as a Super Deluxe Edition³⁷, with the entire Leeds show, and the full show from Hull the next day. Both wonderfully recorded, they capture the band at its most powerful and are great references to how they played the material, and how they interacted with the audience. Their 1970 performance at the Isle of Wight festival is also available as a cd³⁸. It's the only live album to feature the show in real sequence (both Leeds and Hull have the *Tommy* section on one disc).

In addition to this, there's the rare and unreleased, obligatory to a Who fanatic of my stature. A full show from Amsterdam in 1969³⁹ (here I have to trust the sleeve) is available as a bootleg and is a great soundboard recording of an early *Tommy*-tour show. The band is on fire and the interaction is funny and it's a shame it's not for general sale. *Tommy* is a record the band would also play later in their career, most notably in 1975-76 and in 1989. From the seventies we have six song *Tommy* segment from June 12, 1976, Vetch Field in Swansea, Wales. This was released on the record "*View from a Backstage Pass*", available as a Who

³³ The Who (1996): *Tommy*, 531043-2, Polydor Ltd, Originally released in 1969 as Track 613 013/4

³⁴ The Who (2003): *Tommy Deluxe Edition*, 602498610114 Geffen

³⁵ The Who (Unknown year of print): *Tommy*, 2612 006 Polydor. Vinyl Edition, printed in Germany, original mix.

³⁶ This pressing has a peculiar feature. The vinyl is pressed so that disc one has side one and four, and the other has side two and three. I've never seen it before, or since.

³⁷ The Who (2010): *Live at Leeds 40th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition*, 0602527500720 Polydor, Universal Music Company, originally released in 1970 as *Live at Leeds*, Track 2406 001

³⁸ The Who (1996): *Live at the Isle of Wight Festival 1970*, EDF CD 326 Castle Communications, Sony Music Entertainment

³⁹ The Who (2002): *Amazing Journey September 29, 1969, Concertgebouw Amsterdam*, ISR2566 25CD Interscope Records

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fan club membership gift⁴⁰, and not available to the general public. The playing is fierce and powerful, brutal yet dynamic and is a great document of the last tour with the original line up. This tour is widely bootlegged (as a result of better tape recorders? Music technology students take notice!), with a couple of shows worth mentioning. I have a VERY noisy bootleg from Cleveland⁴¹ and a second generation tape DVD from Houston⁴² that I find entertaining and hilarious.

From the 1989 tour we got an entire live album *Join Together*⁴³, with most of *Tommy* (only leaving out "Underture" and "Welcome") on one disc. This album and tour has been dubbed "The Who on Ice" by most Who fans (lacks that little "rock" spark) but it is fine on its own and sports a great song selection. It's wonderfully recorded and mastered but alas, as this is not a highlight in their career it's now deleted and a reissue is probably not on the agenda. To accompany this, a taped radio broadcast from Radio City Music Hall is a much traded bootleg⁴⁴. The live material mentioned here will be used as reference in the third section of this work. I expect you, my dear reader, to sell your grandmother on eBay to get money to buy all of these goodies mentioned above.

Aside from the usual curriculum in popular music studies I have chosen to bring in some books that need special mention. For this study I have chosen three very different books about the Who.

From the first book, "*Before I get Old*"⁴⁵ by American music journalist Dave Marsh I will take biographical material, along with theoretical background for *Tommy*. Marsh released his book in 1983 and it was perhaps the first major work on the band by anyone. He had the opportunity to speak to the band, their friends and families when history was still fresh and the book is very detailed on the bands early career up to the mid - seventies. The section on *Tommy*, in particular, is very well written and interesting, with many thoughts I will draw upon in my writing.

⁴⁰The Who (2007): *View From a Backstage Pass*, thewho.com1 Who Group Ltd/Gleamtreck Ltd

⁴¹The Who (1998): *Wholiday in Cleveland*, WH 003/4 Wholiday Music

⁴²The Who (2007) *The Who in Houston 1975*, 42032 Masterplan

⁴³The Who (1990): *Join Together*, CDVDT 102 Virgin Records LTD

⁴⁴No info available. I Got it in an internet trade.

⁴⁵Marsh, Dave: *Before I get Old, The Story of The Who, 1983*, London: Plexus Publishing Limited

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Marsh's book represents early serious Who criticism and is an interesting read to popular music students today. In his analysis Marsh focuses mainly on the cultural framework in which the band operated and displays no notable knowledge of music theory and no noticeable knowledge about music at all, let alone knowledge about the Who's music.

The second book, *The Life Of Pete Townshend*⁴⁶, is recent, but has a rather unusual origin. American fan Mark Wilkerson has put together a biography of Pete Townshend based on news clippings and interviews from his entire career, making it a biography in "his own words". An amazing feat, and the book is detailed in how many of the records came about and, like the book by Marsh, describes the band's relationship with the audience, and their never-ending struggle to write and perform music as The Who. Both books is a must read for aspiring Who fans out there. The reason for choosing this is that it's an encyclopedia of Townshend's thoughts and theories on his music, and Wilkerson lets Townshend speak for himself, displaying the contradictory nature of his thoughts and statements.

The third book is by long time Who fan John Atkins and his *The Who on record, a critical history 1963-1998*⁴⁷. This book concentrates on the actual recorded output of the band, and very little else. Atkins is enthusiastic and detailed, displaying a dazzling amount of knowledge about the band. What makes this an essential read is the fact that Atkins is one of those fans who were there when it all happened, getting into The Who when they were a huge pop act, and not some teenager in the nineties (me), who got into The Who when they were the godfathers of rock. His analysis is based on his own cognitive reception of the music, and, like Marsh, shows no educated knowledge about music or music theory other than a reference here and there to simple guitar chords. This is the kind of analysis described in Allan Moore's *Rock - The Primary Text* and it's the kind of analysis I applaud, as it is very effective.

As I mentioned in the introduction, to build an analysis around complex musical notations and diagrams is somewhat useless as they will never fully reflect how an audience is listening. Atkins's book is essential reading to anyone wanting to write and about The Who and is interesting in the world of popular music studies, as well as popular musicology, as Atkins uses simple yet very effective analytical approaches.

⁴⁶ Wilkerson, Mark: *The Life Of Pete Townshend*, 2008, London: Omnibus Press

⁴⁷ Atkins, John: *The Who on Record A Critical History, 1963-1998*, 2000: London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers

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From theatre studies, there are some books that need a special mention. Jon Nygaards *Teatrets Historie I Europa I-III* is, as mentioned above, an interesting study for a holistic approach to history, but it fails to make a lasting impression as Nygaard is far too inaccurate when handling facts. I keep it in, however, as he paints the contours of a way of reading theatre history that popular music studies could learn a great deal from. In his books, the theatre is not an autonomous institution, rather an art form that inescapably operates within a social context, and Nygaard rarely analyses any form of theatre without at the same time describing the society it belongs to. This way of reading history is interesting and entertaining, but must be treated with great caution, as some of the analytical content is pure speculation and sometimes almost marxistic in articulation. The aforementioned *The Empty Space* by Peter Brook⁴⁸ has also been of great use.

To balance this I have chosen Brockett/Hildy and their *History of The Theatre vol 9*⁴⁹ as it is the standard history work in theatre studies. It's easy to navigate in, with a simple, accurate description of theatre history. It does, however, contain none of Nygaards way of reading history – it basically tells the theatre history as a visual art form without trying to explain WHY certain plays became popular. This is where Nygaard triumphs. Despite the aforementioned precautions needed to read him, he has at least managed to articulate and explore the dialectic relationship between the actors and the audience. In other words, he treats theatre history as operating within popular culture and as pop culture, which makes his dystopian ending and failure to identify fully functioning modern forms of theatre like the rock concert all the more mysterious.

Then there's the actual meeting between audience and actor itself. On the subject of performance there's really only one book to read which is Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory*⁵⁰. The book is valuable to anyone writing about a live situation, be it art or theatre. The examples are educational and to the point, and Schechner is eager to clarify definitions in the theatre study discourse, making it highly valuable in this thesis as it helps carving out new territory in the pop/rock stage art analysis.

⁴⁸ Brooks 2008 (1968)

⁴⁹ Brockett/Hildy: *History of the Theatre 9th Ed*, 2003, London: Allyn and Bacon

⁵⁰ Schechner, Richard: *Performance Theory*, 2003, London: Routledge Classics

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The rock stage history is further investigated in a larger historical and religious context, as I will try to discuss *Tommy* through the lens of myth and ritual theory. This is largely based on the work found in Robert Segals *Myth and Ritual Theory*⁵¹, a book that in easy steps explains the origins of the theory and current status in fascinating and entertaining detail. The book is also valuable as it explains in simple terms the concept of art reflecting an audience, a further investigation into popular culture that is sorely needed in popular music studies.

Together these books help carve out the way through the three steps described in the previous chapter, guiding our focus from the announcement of the *Tommy* album, through the music it represents, and in the end how it met its audience.

2.0 Christmas

2.1 Cousin Kevin – or A new bastard genre?

*"Musical disputes are not about the music "in itself", but about how to place it, what it is about the music that is to be assessed. After all, we can only hear music as valuable when we know what to listen to and how to listen to it"*⁵².

Flashback to 1997, and I'm in front of my class presenting the "cd of the week". My class is not made up of ordinary students; they are, like me, high school music students, full of meanings about life and music and a tough crowd to be in front of. Today is no exception. I have decided to play the "Overture" from *Tommy*, an entertaining piece of music, bound to trigger interest in this mosaic of music listeners. To my surprise there is very little response when it's over. No one knows what to say. Finally a girl trumpet player breaks the ice by pointing out that the horn is flat.

⁵¹ Segal, Robert (Ed): *The Myth and Ritual Theory*, 1998, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc

⁵² Frith, Simon: *Performing Rites. On the Value of Popular Music*, 1996. Oxford: Oxford University Press p 26

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I was known as a huge fan of The Who back then and people respected my interests (the Metallica and jazz fans were crazier than me, but as they were into contemporary artist, nobody took notice. And they didn't write rock operas. Yet.) But every time I mentioned rock opera and *Tommy* in particular, the conversation often erupted in heated discussions as a result of the student group not sharing common language about the genre. More than often it resulted in me pretending to understand opera and classical music and the others pretending to like and appreciate rock and *Tommy*. This might explain my choice of music that day. I now see that I was actively trying to bridge the gap between the different approaches to music and trying to please everybody; my logic being that, since it is rock opera, every music student, classically trained or punk aficionado must like it. The problem, as Frith is quoted on saying at the beginning of this chapter, was that students in my class, made up of classical and popular music musicians, had no common usable language with which to talk about or appreciate rock opera.

The combination of highbrow and lowbrow art like rock and opera, what seems to be a forced bastard child of music, was, and to some degree still is, a music-hierarchical conflict of the highest order - It hits a bad nerve with almost every musician I've met because of the music hierarchy panic arising from it. Just the mention of the words rock opera will likely produce a sarcastic giggle in any listener/rock fan, not because they find rock opera funny, but because they don't know what to make of it. Those trying to write or produce rock operas often find themselves ridiculed and their music not taken seriously - or in some cases - too serious. This music hierarchy was still evident when I was a teenager at music high school, where the classical canon was the main text of study and pop/rock was seen as a novelty. Rock opera, in the world of the musician, is a genre surrounded by big orange cones: accident zone. Stay away.

As a result, the rock fans in my class didn't know what to make of the album (nor were they able to identify the horn as flat) and the brass section in class never took any notice of the *Overture's* playfulness, grand scale, wit and humor (my descriptions).

But if we didn't meet around the music, we certainly met around the discussion about genre. I spent many lunch hours defending and discussing *Tommy* particularly in the light of the term rock opera and the problems arising from pop artist dabbling with the serious art world. Both

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Marsh and Atkins are imperative in pointing out that *Tommy* paved the way for the seventies art and progressive rock scene and the acceptance of rock within a larger cultural context:

*"Its significance is that it represented the break from one narrow sub-culture (the pop world) into the wider greater field of art within society, and therefore helped legitimize rock and roll as an artistic form. Many would argue that this was an unnecessary and retrograde step, especially in the light of some of the art-rock and concept albums of the 1970s, which enhanced all of the pretentiousness and inherent banality of the form without the innocent vitality."*⁵³

I couldn't agree more. And some of more interesting discussions around the lunch table in high school were indeed those centered in the quality of those albums (*Tommy* included, which broke my heart). Many musicians playing classical music would praise the albums Atkins is referring to in the quote above: Pink Floyd, Marillion, Emerson, Lake And Palmer and the like. It seems that *Tommy* opened the door for pop artist to be recognized from outside the pop world.

As I mentioned in the analysis chapter, the musicology hierarchy is fading slowly away, opening up for us to appreciate the term rock opera without having to deal with the loaded music terminology and musical training pedigree that would often mar the discussions, instead taking rock opera as a genre one hundred per cent serious, thus lifting it out of the hierarchy loaded discourse trap it's been caught in since its appearance 42 years ago.

The center point of *Tommy* - and rock opera criticism, is the creation, acceptance and continuous use of rock opera as a genre label for the album. Today though, it is hard to imagine the cultural impact of such a bombastic genre combination but in 1968, when the idea was coined and used, this was something new⁵⁴. The genre label has been widely challenged, writers and scholars constantly point out that *Tommy* bears no signs of being an opera.

They are to some degree absolutely right: for example, it lacks one of operas signature features, the recitative. But even pointing out such a fact, doesn't seem to alter the rock opera stamp the record has had for the last 42 years. Have we no better genre description? Why not

⁵³ Atkins 2000: 126

⁵⁴ Marsh 1983: 312

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just call it a rock album? (We certainly can) or a pop opera? (That works fine also) - Or a musical?

The Musical – that dreaded form of light music entertainment, has been lurking in the wings of the *Tommy* genre debate ever since the album came out. With good reason: on the surface of it and in how the music is presented, *Tommy* certainly resemblances the stage musical genre in the way that rock borrowed certain elements from musical theatre. As Pete Townshend puts it:

*"...the supporting structure of music theatre somehow began to show itself like a manifesting ghost in early British rock. The Beatles larked about like Arthur Askey in panto, Ray Davies exalted the glamour of the working-class world; The Who wrote songs that with a few word changes could have been squeezed into My Fair Lady"*⁵⁵

Rock borrowing from the musical theatre, however, doesn't mean that by cobbling the songs together you automatically have a musical. Where the opera has recitative as a genre signature, the musical has spoken dialogue as its dramatic carrier. Musically unsupported spoken dialogue must be staged to trigger drama.

The legacy of the debate surrounding *Tommy* as a musical can easily be found by just walking through London day of the week, looking up at the billboards. Rock is today an integral part of the musical stage, or more specific: the sound of rock in the music is every day in the musical theatre both on Broadway and in London West End. The traces can be found in the a) adapting the rock sound for the sound of the musical and b) works that began as concept albums such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and c) in the adaptation and dramatization of existing body of works or music styles like we've seen in the later years.

The first point is the inclusion of pop and rock sound in the musical theatre. In his chapter "*From Hair to Rent: "rock" on Broadway?*" Scott Warfield (2002)⁵⁶ discusses the implication of rock intrusion onto the American musical stage. My interest here is in the definitions and their relation to my discussions about authenticity.

⁵⁵ Jackson, James: *Pete Townshend on Quadrophenia, touring with The Who and the Mod revival*, online (accessed 05.05.2009) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/music/article2417436.ece>

⁵⁶ Warfield, Scott: *From Hair to Rent; "rock on Broadway?"* – in Everett/Laird (ed): *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2002. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p 235-239

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The first musical to emerge as a body of work to be labeled "rock musical" was the 1968 production of "Hair". Warfield writes:

*"...on Broadway the term "rock musical" has retained currency, either as a show's formal subtitle or as an appellation casually used by critics and others to describe a particular work. Yet despite widespread use of the term over the past four decades, no scholarly or even semi-formal definition of the "rock musical" has ever appeared in print. Instead, the "rock musical" has remained an extremely pliable category, capable of embracing a wide range of characteristics."*⁵⁷

Tommy is further down the same page lumped together with other musicals following an argument which suggests that both "rock opera" and "rock musical" is variants of their parent genres. Sure, *Tommy* has had its run on the musical stage on both sides of the Atlantic but my interest here lies not in the confusion surrounding "opera" or "musical". My problem with all this is the use of the word "rock" as a descriptive term for the music that is being produced on the musical stage.

What I don't see is a clear lineage. Again I'm suggesting an authenticity problem. The rock musical or musicals with rock is as Marsh suggests "*attempts to exploit rock*"⁵⁸, exemplified by *Hair* which opened in New York on 2 December 1967⁵⁹ predating *Tommy* by roughly a year and a half. He goes on to conclude that

*"...in the sixties, with an unbounded sense of cultural opportunity and optimism abroad, it actually seemed urgent that the possibility of expanded form in rock not to be left to Hair and Jesus Christ Superstar. (...) Tommy is a development of the rock tradition as established by Presley and redefined by The Beatles"*⁶⁰

The reason for not calling it a *rock musical* was probably that this label was already in use by institutions one didn't want to be associated with when the album came out and that using the word "musical" would have worked differently in the genre hierarchy debate that erupted in

⁵⁷ Warfield in Everett/Laird 2002:235

⁵⁸ Marsh 1983: 342

⁵⁹ Warfield in Everett/Laird (Ed) 2002: 237

⁶⁰ Marsh 1983: 342

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the wake of *Tommy*, as the musical stage as opposed to opera was already using or exploiting rock.

Judging from the above discussion and it seems to today me that *Tommy* is an album that is more famous or infamous for its genre discussion than for its songs. Without the discussion, the album could be taken as another concept album, but the term rock opera, or at least the use of the word *opera*, redefines our contextual reading of the music and our expectations for the quality of the music. This has been the case since the album was released.

But why is this so? Simon Frith may have an answer when saying that genre is "*..something collusive than as something invented individually, as the result of a loose agreement among musicians and fans, writers and disc jockeys.*"⁶¹. The fans, record label, and rock journalism has, for the last 42 years, used rock opera as the definitive genre label for *Tommy*. It could be said then, that the genre is used and decided by general consensus. The term itself⁶² has muddy origins, but the first serious, distinct use of the term for an album was in the summer of 68 when, interviewed by Rolling Stone magazine, Pete Townshend first pitched the concept for what a year later would become *Tommy*⁶³.

But even though *Tommy* can be held up as a rock opera, it was the Beatles and their Sgt Pepper⁶⁴ released in June 1967⁶⁵ album that opened the doors for pop music artists to make albums as opposed to just feeding the singles market. On closer listen to the album however, and the concept isn't completed (merely through the first two songs and the two variations of the title track) but the door was indeed opened for pop musicians to explore pop music in an album format. What Sgt Pepper has, is at least a sense of a bigger picture, a feeling of an album that should be taken in as a whole, and not just as a collection of stand-alone tracks.

The Who's reaction to The Beatles' record was in December the same year with *The Who Sell Out*⁶⁶, an album made to resemble a radio broadcast, complete with original jingles and ads. Joyous pop songs aside, it too suffered from being incomplete concept-wise. This is

⁶¹ Frith 1996: 88

⁶² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_opera for a general overview .

⁶³ Wilkerson, Mark: *The Life Of Pete Townshend*, 2008, London: Omnibus Press p 109

⁶⁴ The Beatles (1967): *Sgt Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*, PCS 7027 Parlophone

⁶⁵ Atkins 2000:99

⁶⁶ The Who (1995): *The Who Sell Out*, 527 759-2 Polydor Ltd, Originally released in 1967 as Track 612 002 (Mono) and Track 613 002 (Stereo)

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clearly evident if listening to the vinyl edition, where side A is just like a radio show, and side B is nothing more than a collection of songs.

It was the failure of *Sell Out* that motivated The Who and Pete Townshend to come up with *Tommy*, but they were not alone in the race for the rock stage drama prize; British band The Pretty Things and their *SF Sorrow*⁶⁷, from December 1968 is worth mentioning on the basis of what it contains. The music is surprisingly well put together and contains many elements that would later be *Tommies* signatures: sudden key changes, alternative use of a rock combo/orchestration and so on. *SF Sorrow* is a pure joy and was recently rereleased on cd and can easily be considered a gem in the British pop history. It's probably forgotten because of the success of *Tommy*.

The reason lies elsewhere and is, as far as I see it, deeply rooted in The Who as being a British band. In 1968, the chance of Harold Wilson coming out as a Who-fanatic would be as slim as Twiggy on a diet. But the reason for connecting rock and opera lies in being British and British comedy traditions

All the bands mentioned in the genre race above are in fact British bands. *Tommy* arrives the same year Monty Python first enters television. To me, the album is part of the great tradition of mockery. The Who were a comedy team as good as Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin or Monty Python for that matter. One of the things I liked about them when I discovered them was that they were super funny and able to insert comedy into their music and lyrics.

Mockery, in short, is to make a ridiculous, useless copy of something ("this costume is a mockery of a police uniform"), in this instance a rock opera, a mockery of an opera. Mockery plays a big part in the Who history but it is sadly an element that is largely forgotten as they, probably from nineties classic rock oriented journalism, has become the "Great Serious Rock Band With Big Serious Songs About Life And Death". This overshadows a large part of their catalog and an important part of the origins of the rock/art music connection so common today.

Most of what we know about them today can be placed under the mockery banner. They smashed guitars (mocking the value of and respect for the instrument), they sang about their

⁶⁷ The Pretty Things (2009): *S.F. Sorrow*, SDPCD109 Madfish, Snapper Records

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generation (mocking the generation of their parents, the war-heroes), they played opera houses (mocking the opera institutions), and their live album was recorded not in Montreaux or Paris, but in Leeds, in 1970 the British equivalent of the third world, or at least working class, and as far removed from opera as you could get.

Connecting *Tommy* to the word opera can almost certainly be attributed to their manager Kit Lambert, son of Constant Lambert, author of the music critique classic *Music Ho!* Lamberts motivation was to poke fun and ridicule the established British music scene and with *Tommy*, he got the ridicule, or mockery, as it were, right. It was also Lambert who encouraged Townshend to experiment with the pop format and to subsequently write a rock opera – he helped, it seems, with both theoretical and musical input⁶⁸. Rock opera is to kick upwards and ridicule the opera genre. Here already lies one conclusion to my problem positioned at the beginning of this thesis: *Tommy* belongs to the history of opera as an opera parody. It is in fact a mockery just by the title. Where the classic operas had titles such as *Dido & Æneas*, *Alceste*, *Der Zauberflöte*, and *Così fan Tutte* with pompous themes and stupid stories, here came The Who with *TOMMY*, a rock opera. It must have made every rock fan chuckle when it came out.

Even so, this far I have only listed albums and songs that have been labeled concept albums/rock operas. To understand the term, will it be valuable to break down the term in two? I'll leave it to other scholars to define the word rock, as Rock is a term that is hard to define in simple words as it has been used as a label for more than fifty years, describing a vast variation of different styles and approaches for making and producing music. To make thing worse, The Who is a band that is usually described as both rock and pop at the same time. Dave Marsh's book in particular makes no effort to distinguish the two terms sometimes using them alongside each other in the same sentence. But since there are no exclusions of the use of the word rock and The Who, we have more than enough justification to call them a rock band.

Opera, on the other hand, is surprisingly easy to define, as it started as art music, thus resting on a basic theoretical ground. Joseph Kerman⁶⁹ writes that "...*Opera is a type of drama whose*

⁶⁸ For further info see Motion, Andrew: *Part III Kit in Motion*, Andrew: *The Lamberts*, 1995, London: Faber and Faber Ltd

⁶⁹ Kerman, Joseph: *Opera as Drama*, 1988, Los Angeles: University of California Press

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integral existence is determined from point to point and in the whole by musical articulation"⁷⁰. This is, as I see it, where rock opera distinguishes itself from concept or theme albums. Concept albums may have great thoughts and concept about the context of the songs but rock operas must have their meaning and drama within the song.

The origins of opera are found in Renaissance Italy and Florence, and the Members of the Camerata. Their goal was to recreate the theatre of Ancient Greek, focusing on music and the relationship to drama⁷¹. The first attempts were of course simple, and perhaps hilarious by today's standards, but it was from here on that opera grew into the art form we know today. Opera, before *Tommy* was an art form strictly confined in the opera houses, which was again used as political arenas and city planning discussions like the one we observed in Oslo.

Pity then that, like regular theatre, opera is in the mind of the regular music lover, forever linked to the 19th century/early 20th century forms. Opera is normally given the Wagner/Viking Hat treatment and Theatre is connected with the realism of Ibsen and Strindberg.

It looks like the perfect mockery and the perfect hi-jacking of a genre ever conducted: A bunch of young, nasty Shepherds' Bush boys flipping the finger to the high-brow art world, making a mockery version of an opera, upsetting the normal opera audiences and institutions, and then finding a bigger audience than any opera house would only dream of. That is at least what the story looks like when you first enter the world of The Who and *Tommy* and it's the rough story that fits so well in what I would call dated rock journalism – the rock band that shook the system.

It's simply not true. From what I can see, *Tommy* and rock opera was in fact warmly welcomed in the institutionalized opera world. It was fairly reviewed by critics and hailed as a great attempt of merging popular music and dramatic arts. Marsh writes:

"Tommy received serious scrutiny from a number of classical critics in the States. After the group played a week at the Fillmore East in October, Opera News wrote respectfully, "As medieval Indian music, their bodies expressed the sound of the music and to a certain degree the libretto..." And while the reviewer said Tommy lacked the "originality of the Beatles"

⁷⁰ Kerman 1988: 10

⁷¹ Brockett/Hildy 2003: 163

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*and complained that the Who were "three times as loud as Hair, ten times as loud as the fff in the "Dies Irae" of the Verdi Requiem", the tome throughout was that this was an experiment and an experiment well worth taking seriously*⁷²

At this point we might ask ourselves why then, do we fear and love this genre and record. Why do we think that opera people hated it? The answer lies in a simple confrontation with one's rock self: Rock opera isn't just a mockery of opera – it is also mockery of rock. The Who, by inventing the rock opera, was confronting the large rock audience with the fact that rock music could be more, and have a tonal palette far bigger than the one used at that time. Even worse, it was a huge success. Shaw once wrote that "The secret of success is to offend the largest number of people". The big offended audience was not in the opera houses, but the general rock audience in front of their audio system, beer in hand. The shock of something like a rock opera actually being more than a gimmick must have been huge

My point is that despite "rock opera" being a loosely guarded term, to actually make one that works is extremely hard and demanding, but will, if constructed and put together correctly, work on a very simple premise. Says Pete Townshend:

*"I always felt, right from my very first song and the reaction to it from the kids in my neighborhood, that in a pop song the function was different to the songs from music theatre. There was already a story being experienced, by the listener – the context was already established. Songs about fantasy and a romantic future didn't seem useful anymore. A song had to fit into the world we were living in, and that was an immediate postwar world in which Britain and its youth had to face massive change. The cult of the individual happened because we found our own language, and that was very much enshrined in music (...) I avoided the temptation to complete the story or to try to make the characters whole and reachable. I have always understood that rock and pop need music and a star system that offers partly empty vessels to the audience""*⁷³

The "partly empty vessel" is the key word in this discussion. The term rock opera has, from the very origin, been the object of discussions and arguments even master thesis work like the

⁷² Marsh 1983: 341-342

⁷³ Jackson, James: *Pete Townshend on Quadrophenia, touring with The Who and the Mod revival*, online (accessed 05.05.2009) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/music/article2417436.ece>

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one you're reading right now. This starts with *Tommy* and has stuck with it ever since, as a genre label, *and* as a genre label discussion. Rock opera as a term is something that ultimately *demand*s an opinion from the listener, no matter if you're a fan of rock or the classic art music.

Because the album was pitched as early as a year before hand, the label is already there, functioning as a marketing tool, or even better, a music discourse. In other words, the term rock opera creates a genre definition vacuum, or a "partly empty vessel" which the listener is forced to fill with his or her own meaning of those words, thus being forced to listen to the album differently than if the album had been another concept album. Here lies a double mockery: The fact that the genre label was a mockery, and that the discussion arising from it made serious music fans, journalists, and scholars partake in a serious discourse about the music mocking their own music.

As I look at my record collection, I find many albums that have had rock opera or concept album as their label. One such record is Green Day and their 2004 hit album *American Idiot*⁷⁴. Is it a rock opera? I find myself trapped as a listener by having that question in my head. I concentrate hard on being taken into the record, I want to identify characters and events, journeys and drama. But despite it being labeled a rock opera, I can't really see it a proper label on the album, it comes closer to a concept album, in the tradition of *Quadrophenia* or *The Wall* by Pink Floyd⁷⁵. These last two albums are those who are usually mentioned alongside *Tommy* in the rock opera genre. But none of them are, as they bear no signs of dramatic music (see next chapter)

Even as a concept album, things can go wrong. In 2003, Neil Young reached a nadir with his album *Greendale*⁷⁶. What could have been sold as a bluesy, disaster-song- like state of the nation album, quickly sank because it was being performed as a stage show, complete with Youngs crew acting behind him and the band Crazy Horse. The acoustic tour preceding the album was phenomenal and intimate, the album and following tour a stomach-cringing disaster..

⁷⁴ Green Day (2004): *Green Day Presents American Idiot*, 9362 48777-2, Reprise

⁷⁵ As heard on the double live album Pink Floyd (2000): *Is There Anybody Out There? The Wall 1980-81*, 5240752 EMI

⁷⁶ Young, Neil with Crazy Horse (2003): *Greendale*, 9362-48533-2 Reprise Records

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Another note-worthy disaster came from Kiss in 1982 and their *Music from The Elder*⁷⁷. They too ruined what could have been the release of a bold musical statement, instead bringing in the words rock opera into the release, thus finding themselves with their worst career disaster in their hand (for Kiss that says a lot). The music is actually not that bad when taken just as rock music. In fact, the name Kiss also carries unwanted connotations, as we as Kiss fans expect songs about partying and sex, rather than a tale of...I have no idea what the album is about.

Rock opera as a genre label for *Tommy* works within the spectrum between serious and mockery, between the joke and the drama and between what the music, by labeling it rock opera, is supposed to sound like, and what the music actually consists of, and in the end to where the music takes us and why. This is the aura *Tommy* has had for the last 42 years, and the secret to the never ending discussion is that the music itself plays a vital part in this fascination. Simon Frith writes that :

*"...the importance of all popular genres is that they set up expectations, and disappointment is likely both when they are met and when they are met all too predictably"*⁷⁸

Tommy in light of its label, operates within the gap between meeting and not meeting the expectations of a label, and the music enhances that. But to argue further into this, we must listen to and look at the music of this beautiful goofball album.

2.2 The Acid Queen – "Christmas" analysis

Listening to *Tommy* today is a strange experience. It is, despite its attached legend as the Who's saving musical statement, a very quiet album, and sadly, a bit dated in its sounds. It is dated only in modern terms – we define it as dated only through our memory of later, better produced albums. Compared to other albums from 1969 it doesn't stand out at all, in fact there are many albums far worse in their sonic presentation than *Tommy*. The overall

⁷⁷ KISS (1981): *Music From The Elder*, 6302 163 Polygram Records

⁷⁸ Frith 1996: 94

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impression sound-wise is an album that is easy to listen to with a clear distinct mix, but perhaps lacking the full-on sonic attack they would have with *Who's Next*.

The album's producer Kit Lambert may have lacked the skills and financial funding to do the Who justice as a sound recorder, but his ultimate triumph with this project was that it got made at all, especially if we consider that it was preceded by a number of attempts - some of which failed, others triumphed – extend the pop format and the scope of the pop song. The musical origins of *Tommy* is scattered in the band's early career, and is a delight to indulge in, even if the recorded results were of mixed quality.

The first serious venture into opera, or at least experimenting with the pop song format, came on *A Quick One*⁷⁹ (another funny, mocking title, as it could easily have been "The Little Girl"), The Who's second album of original material. Today it's largely remembered as a perfect example of the difficult second album, but only pales because the other, later albums are so good. It's in short a happy go lucky pop album, with a couple of standout tracks in "So sad about" us and "Boris the Spider". What sets this album apart is the nine minute ending "A Quick one While He's Away", clocking in at nine minutes, absolutely unheard of at the time. It's been called a mini-opera, it consists of six short songs, each telling a story of a girl guide and her adultery with Ivor the Engine driver. She's later forgiven.

The music in these sections are short major key songs each section is set up against the previous one creating musical suspense and anticipation through modulation, usually to the dominant chord and through changing style. The opening is sounds like an opera choir, the next song is rock, followed by a vaudeville-esque refrain and so on. The result is a "song" that never really rests on any particular chord or style until the end, or "finale" when the lines "You are forgiven!" are sung over the chords of D-G-A, the standard harmony pattern.

This song became a standard in the live set both before and after the release of *Tommy*, and in the introduction of the song, the band and Pete Townshend and Keith Moon in particular, worked their comedy skills to the full. The introduction can be found on the *Super Deluxe Edition* of *Live at Leeds*, released in 2010⁸⁰. The song has recently gotten some live exposure; Green Day played it during their *21st Century Breakdown* tour of 2009, even recording it as a

⁷⁹ The Who (1995): *A Quick One*, 527 758-2 Polydor Ltd, Originally released in 1966 as 593002 Reaction

⁸⁰ It also appears on the bonus disc on The Who (2008): *Live at Kilburn*, 88697391839 Spitfire Pictures, Sony BMG Music Entertainment

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bonus track for the record with the same name. The American group My Morning Jacket played it on their 2006 tour⁸¹.

Lasting nine minutes, they were able to explore the possibilities of a musical vessel to carry the show that was different to that of the two-minute pop song. "A Quick One..." was probably the song which demonstrated the musical dramatical, and dynamic ranges needed for the band to explore format of the rock concert further, like they would end up doing on *Tommy*. It's worth noting that *Tommy* feels like an extension of "A Quick One...", on the grounds that the album never really goes beyond the composition - technical skills demonstrated in "A Quick One...".

This mini-opera concept was followed on *Sell Out* and the closing track "Rael" without having the same qualities as its predecessor, but the album nevertheless carried the torch and contained musical elements that would later end up on *Tommy*, most notably the "Sparks"-theme. After *Sell Out*, the band entered a strange, entertaining and important phase of their career. In the one and a half year gap before *Tommy*, they released a string of singles rarely mentioned or played today. These songs include "Glow Girl", "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde", "Little Billy", "Melancholia", "Dogs", "Call me Lightning" and "Magic Bus". All of these songs carry many of the musical elements that would eventually build up towards the full rock opera. Listening to them today though, gives you a feeling of them being songs that are building up to and preparing the band for something far bigger.

Tommy doesn't only achieve to be a fully self-contained work over four sides of vinyl, but also displays a surprisingly clear and steady nod to baroque music. This was not unfamiliar in the world of The Who or indeed their fans; many of their greatest achievements on record had music that can be seen as a pastiche on baroque chord progression and melodic construction. It's just that the baroque style was never in front as it would be on *Tommy*. Hints to baroque music, alongside the mockery described the previous chapter, is one of the crucial elements of the Who fascination now largely and sadly forgotten, thanks to the success of *Who's Next* and its dominance on the Greatest Hits compilations. In terms of musical style, the album was not a shock in its time as such: the surprise came in how it was used.

⁸¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Quick_One,_While_He's_Away

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The nods to baroque music is what makes this music British, or at least what sets The Who apart from what many American bands at the time were writing, borrowing heavily from the blues traditions and Motown R&B, much in the same way The Who did on their first album. These bands would include Mountain, The Doors, Buffalo Springfield and Canned Heat all of which operated around the time of The Who.

The middle -eight in "I'm a Boy" was a conscious attempt by Townshend to write a piece of music using Henry Purcell's "Fantasy upon one Note" as inspiration. The resulting song was entertaining and that middle-eight was the start of many such bridges, intros, and middle - eights. *Tommy* is flooded with them, the most famous example is perhaps from the hit single "Pinball Wizard".

The note on which the variation is played is F# as part of a Bm cord, second inversion. The progression is as follows, each chord lasting a full 4/4 bar:

Bm/F# - Bmsus4/F# - F#7sus4 – F#7 – F#m7 – Em/F# - Em/G – F#sus4 – F#

The song then shoots off with a Bsus4 to B chord strumming, releasing all the tension built up in the intro. It's a mastery display of starting out in a relatively open chord, closing and narrowing the tonal palette to maximum tension, only to release it the next second. This display of suspense that had been a signature from their very first LP, with *The kids Are All Right* as a prime example, would be in full display on *Tommy*⁸² as I shall demonstrate shortly.

In the classic rock – sphere the best known song from *Tommy* is "Pinball Wizard" and it's not without reason: the chord changes sets up tension and release, the lyrics follow these changes and builds up the same tension and release. The character we learn about in the song is crystal clear, with a clear entrance and goals, we immediately know who he is and what he wants. "Pinball Wizard" is a prime example of a perfectly composed, self – contained pop song.

There's only one small problem. It's not opera. Even though we get a second voice singing "how do you think he does it?" in the middle eight, the modulation is too anticipated and homogenic to pass as rock - opera: There's no contrast or tension set up, as such no characterization pulling in different direction and thus no drama. The main character in "Pinball Wizard" is no doubt set up against the main character in the story, but only in the

⁸² But for some reason, this kind of music is almost totally abandoned on later albums.

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arch-narrative: He's there, on the basis that he is spoken of, yet at the same time, judging by what we hear, he's not present as a contrasting character in the song.

Why then, is *Tommy* known as a rock opera if the most famous track of it cannot be labeled rock opera? It is my opinion that our association of "Pinball Wizard" as rock opera comes from an understanding of the whole album as a rock opera, and that finding the traces of our way of reading the album must be found elsewhere on the album

It's on this premise that I feel an urge to speak up for some of the lesser known songs and "Christmas" in particular and pointing out where this reading originates musically. But first, an overall look at the music in general.

Most of the tracks are written in major keys. Here and there the minor keys appear as bridges or choruses. The harmonic structures are baroque-style as on previous records. It is noteworthy that Townshend is using keys and chords not commonly used in guitar based pop and rock. "There's a doctor" is in Bb, which is unusual. "1921" ends in the tonical centre of Eb and so on. This makes the album full of tonal variation and as a consequence we hear more colors from the instruments, an element that would not be evident if let's say the album was written entirely in A.

The instrumentation is simple and sparse. One of the instruments that stand out is the acoustic guitar, both six - and twelve stringed. "Pinball Wizard" is a great example of a track based around the fast, flamenco style strumming of Townshend. The bass tracks are played with a sober approach, more or less following the ground note, intersped with fifths and octaves and a clean sound. John Entwistle was known for his fast fingers (his nickname was Thunderfingers) but that fast, flamboyant, off the wall playing only manifested itself on later albums, such as *Quadrophenia*.

The drums are probably the most disappointing instrument on this record. Keith Moon was the best, fastest and funniest drummer that ever lived, but on this record his drums are somewhat flat and dull sounding. This record was a result of many retakes and overdubs so the spontaneity was probably lost in the process. One only need to listen to live recording like the aforementioned *Live At Leeds* album or the *Live At The Isle Of Wight* to understand what the drum tracks could have sounded like.

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Not that his drumming on this album is bad, it's just that they're not properly captured on tape, but if one listens closely there are great moments on this record, the "Overture" in particular. On a positive side, the sober playing means that the listener focuses on the songs and the music as a whole.

There's also a wide use of non-band instruments. The organ in the "Overture" is probably the instrument that dates this recording the most. The use of organ in rock music was short-lived (the synthesizer soon took over), but on this record it adds to the opera part of rock opera. The piano plays a vital part on some tracks like "Sally Simpson" and the "Overture", again giving it a "classic" feel. Another signature Who instrument is the French horn played by Entwistle.

I find this to be a very interesting element to the sound of the record. Intentionally or not, a flat-sounding⁸³ horn strongly contributes to the rock opera as a joke, or a late sixties British humor take on an established art form. However, the horn parts add a classic feel to the record. There was allegedly talk of adding orchestration to the songs but this was rejected as it would be impossible for the band to recreate the album as a four-piece band live. The horn, then, is an unfinished idea.⁸⁴

As mentioned earlier, no instrument stands out in the performance as being virtuous. Instead, *Tommy* is the album in which the vocals play a vital part. On *A Quick One* and *Sell Out*, Roger Daltrey sounded lost and uncomfortable, his voice not showing his full potential as a singer. This is a bit strange considering the quality of some of the songs. On *Tommy*, however, he finds his voice. No other record has changed a vocalist to such a degree as *Tommy* did with Daltrey. His voice is clear and confident throughout and shows a variation and control rarely found in rock.

So where on the album do we find the answer to our questions about rock opera? The track chosen for the analysis is the song "Christmas". I chose this because it, more than any other track, demonstrates how dramatic moments derives from how the music is constructed, played and recorded, as opposed to coming from purely lyrical content. Other tracks have more or

⁸³ See previous chapter

⁸⁴ An orchestrated version of the album was released in 1972 with several guest vocalists: London Symphony Orchestra and English Chamber Choir with Guest Soloists (2009): *Tommy*, Rep 5128 Repertoire Records. Originally released in 1972 on Ode Records.

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less the same elements, like "Go to The Mirror" and "We're not Gonna take it", but this songs just does everything better and more elegant.

"Christmas" is not the most famous song off the album, but it was played regularly during the *Tommy* tour, and has the benefit of not having been analyzed to death by journalists and other scholars in the 42 years since released. It has somehow evaded the classic rock journalism sphere.

Even though *Tommy* will be forever associated with the hit single "Pinball Wizard", I believe, as previously mentioned, that it's the plot-carrying songs such as "Christmas" that provided the listener with musical riddles that made this record stand out when it was released. In fact, this song and the other narrative songs on the album have never been fully recognized as being important to the success of *Tommy*. They've had very little airplay (not, at least to my knowledge, of any significance) and are usually described as the songs that prevents *Tommy* from being a great album, by fans and listeners. To me though, "Christmas" is the song that gets the action in *Tommy* going.

The effect of listening to this on vinyl caught me by surprise, despite the fact that I have been grooving to this record since 97 when The Who caught my attention. On the vinyl edition, it is the opening of side two, a point now lost on the digital format listener. Side A runs from the "Overture", through to "The Hawker". In the course of these songs, we learn about Tommy's parents and their struggles, "Amazing Journey" painting the philosophical background for the album, "Sparks" representing Tommy's experience of music, and lastly, "The Hawker", providing the first attempt at curing the boy. Alas, the songs on side A are vague in their lyrical set-up of the plot, and, taken as a whole, side A of *Tommy* is a little unfinished in terms of telling a story.

The albums opening and ending is the most frustrating as it gives very little answers to obvious problems arising from the sparse information we're being given. Who is the lover? Where does he come from? How old are these people? Why kill the lover? Or about the end: What happens to Tommy? Where do his followers go? Why turn against him? By leaving the opening and ending "unfinished", the listener is invited to invest in these and other questions, making them further connected to the work.

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The first of many colorful characters is the aforementioned "Hawker" with the song "Eyesight to the Blind". This is a cover song, and depicts a pimp who promotes a woman with a beauty capable bringing eyesight to the blind, thus healing at least one of the boy's handicaps. The song was probably included for the lyrical content, but the sparse arrangement given by the band on this take adds a little R&B variation to the overall feel of the album. More problematic is the fact, that up until this point, there is little drama to speak of. "Amazing Journey" is full of tension, modulations, and musical release, but alas, there are no characters pulling the drama. One could argue though, that it if nothing else can be heard as a musical articulation of inner turmoil, an inner drama. "Eyesight to the Blind" is like "Pinball Wizard" a little later on the album, a good song that establishes a character that fits the ach-narrative but ultimately fails to deliver the dramatic thrust needed by us to call it rock opera.

"Eyesight to The Blind" ends on the cord of B major. "Christmas" begins on the cord of G major, the final bar in "Eyesight to the Blind" acting as a dominant cord to the opening of "Christmas" as the F# note in the B act as a leading note for G. To connect the music like this makes the album flow at an elegant pace. That G cord in the opening of "Christmas" hits you in the ears when you put the needle down. And on side B, the narrative is tighter and more precise, and so is the music

This is where this thesis enters the story. In "Christmas" song, the parents fear for their son's soul, worrying that he's on the road to damnation as he doesn't know Jesus or praying. It is the first scene where we are taken into the isolated world of Tommy, a world not in touch with those physically around him trying to communicate with him. When acted out as a theatre production, the role of Tommy is relatively mute, and the good songs are sung by other characters, like "Pinball Wizard". Two exceptions are "Sensation" and "I'm Free". The world of Tommy is, when you listen to this track, a lonely but seemingly peaceful place, in stark contrast to the holiday celebrations surrounding him. The scene that is set up is otherworldly bizarre, but it is one of the most powerful, disturbing, heartbreaking and *dramatic* songs on the album.

The event in which this action takes place is not chosen by accident, far from it. Our connotations to the word "Christmas" are deeply felt and very personal. This song is part of long tradition in the world of the theatre, where Christmas celebration is usually portrayed as

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something of a family nightmare. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, where nobody's happy is a great example.

The crux of the Christmas paradox is the conflict between reality and expectations. In her collection of essays concerning Christmas⁸⁵, Sheila Whiteley writes in her introduction that despite

*"...the tensions inherent in wishfulfilment versus reality, the ever increasing emphasis on a secularisation, the phrase "a traditional Christmas" continues to evoke an immediately recognizable picture of the way in which we spend or imagine an "ideal" Christmas."*⁸⁶

Further, she argues how our Christmas culture is shaped by this conception:

*"...the associated sentiments of harmony and goodwill continue to provide an ideological discourse that informs its popular interpretation: a concern for the family, children and family-centred activities, the rituals and expectations framing gift-giving and receiving, and an idealised nostalgia for the past, which prioritises themes of neighbourliness, charity and community."*⁸⁷

The song "Christmas" is just such a "popular interpretation" informed by the Christmas discourse, and the song bears signs of reflecting this in its harmonic and melodic structure. In many ways it reflects the longing for harmony and structure in its choice of key colour, but still manages to fully lay bare the inherent tension that comes with what Whiteley calls "associated sentiments". This utopian longing is perhaps the key to understanding Christmas and its aforementioned status as a venue for exploring and exposing family tensions.

The song has an AABCBA – shape, in the key of G major. The opening section (A) is a nice description of holiday joy, with children waking up early, full of anticipation of what is to come. A "feeling of holiday joy" is here created by a choir in the background, singing a mock – operatic arrangement to great effect.

⁸⁵ Whiteley, Sheila: *Introduction* in Whiteley, Sheila: *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*, 2008, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press p 1-17

⁸⁶ Whiteley 2008: 2

⁸⁷ Whiteley 2008: 2

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We learn from the lyrics in the first verse that Tommy, being deaf, dumb and blind, incapable of taking part in the joy. To his parents' desperate frustration he doesn't even know what day it is. Chord progression in bold:

G

D

Did you ever see the faces of the children they get so excited?

G

D

Waking up on Christmas morning hours before the winter sun's ignited.

G

D

They believe in dreams and all they mean including heavens generosity

G

D

Peeping round the doors to see what parcels are for free in curiosity

G

A

D

And Tommy doesn't know what day it is

G

A

D

He doesn't know who Jesus was or what praying is

G

A D

How can he be saved?

C

G A

From the eternal grave?

Townshend equips the father character with a religious belief adding to the frustration. If Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus, Tommy will be forever doomed as he's not able to see the "the light". "How can he be saved?" he asks, "From the eternal grave" In the second verse we're more or less in the same holiday celebration, but with darker lyrics now coming from just the father. There's clearly a different, darker vibe: The father is talking himself or maybe the mother. It's sung using the exact same joyous music, but with lyrics like this it gives the impression of a parent being in denial.

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Surrounded by his friends he sits so silently and unaware of everything

Playing poxy pinball, picks his nose and smiles and pokes his tongue at everything

I believe in love, but how can man who's never seen light be enlightened?

Only if he's cure will his spirit's future level ever heighten

And Tommy doesn't know what day it is

He doesn't know who Jesus was or what praying is

How can he be saved, from the eternal grave?

Most of the verse is G – D, followed by G- A-D, C-G-D, concluded with C-G-A that goes back to G through to the second verse. That last A major is a chord that anticipates the standard modulation into the dominant chord of D major. After the first verse Moon lays down a drumfill that sort of continues the verse, it binds it together and we're easily escorted from A major and back to G major.

This is not the case after the second verse. Instead, the music almost disappears as if going into a fadeout, and for half a second the sound box is going empty, the listener is left questioning: Is the song over? Without the drum fill, the A major becomes a question mark - it augments the question posed in the lyrics. Then out of nowhere, Townshend takes the music in a completely different direction. The band comes in on a G minor, but only marking the beat and more or less staying in the background and they're playing much more disciplined. This section of the song seems more arranged than the first verses.

The dramatic focus is also altered, producing the most desperate moments on the album. In this section (B), we only hear the father shouting at Tommy: "Tommy can you hear me!" This is repeated three times on the chords Gm-Edim-Ebmaj7-Edim-Eb7⁸⁸. He ends the section with the repeating the lyric "How can he be saved?" on top of the chords Dsus4 – D. This last progression anticipates the music back to the key of G.

The B section of this song is an interesting dramatic moment. Despite the father shouting at his son, he gets no response, not from Tommy or those around. The chord progression is full of tension and never go where we expect it to go. The downward tonal movement equips the

⁸⁸ I have yet to see an official transcription for this but it hardly matters. Whenever I hear a new live-version of this Townshend plays it differently, making it hard to present an accurate chord presentation. The ones I have written, however, sound correct on my guitar when compared to the original recording.

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character with a sense of resignation and loss. A tiny hope can be traced when the chords go back from Ebmaj7 to Edim, but a diminished chord is a hope full of tension and it sadly moves back to Ebm7. The stress is further developed in the speech rhythmic. "Tommy can you hear me?" is sung fast, almost shouted, on beat 3 and 4, every second bar. This gives room for the answer that ultimately never comes.

This is further demonstrated by the next section (C). Instead of landing the music back in its tonical foundation he gives it a twist and again shifting the dramatic focus. The band plays even quieter and giving way for the Tommy character to finally speak. Townshend gives him very little to say, but what he says is used to great effect.

The words "See me, feel me, touch me, heal me" is sung over a simple progression of Ebmaj7-Fsus4-F-Gsus4-G. This theme is repeated whenever Tommy speaks from his "underworld"⁸⁹. In contrast to the father's downward progression, Tommy is singing on an upwards chord exchange. This gives him a musical horizon of hope. The voice is soft and innocent sounding but with a clear entrance ("See Me"), a clear goal ("Feel Me, Touch me"), and a good exit ("Heal Me"). The exit is that he sings Heal Me as a final, clear last message before once again disappearing into silence. His emergence and disappearance showcases a theatrical devise of showing reality A in reality B. When one reality emerges, the other reality freezes.

His exit on the chord of G major is enhanced by the father returning on G minor repeating his desperate cry for his son's attention. Having the two progressions meet at almost the same chord is a very clever dramatic use of music. The effect on the B section is much more intense as we (the listeners) now know Tommy is in there somewhere. After the B section, the holiday celebrations (A) return once again, repeating the lyrics from the first verse, as if nothing had happened.

In this song we are taken in and out of three different realities. Christmas celebration – the father alone – Tommy alone – father alone – Christmas celebration. We are being shown one layer of reality at a time and one musical signature at a time. The voice timbre and phrasing is equally important. The rhythmic pattern in the verse is short, straight forwards eights sung by Daltrey as a narrator. Townshend comes in as the father, with an angrier sounding voice,

⁸⁹ Later on the album the same theme is used to great effect in "Go to the Mirror".

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building the character. The isolated world of Tommy is portrayed with long, mellow notes, giving it clear contrast to the other characters.

Each section is clearly different, yet somehow fits the song as a whole as they together create characterization through music and as a consequence a musical dramatic tension that creates drama. But the dramatic moment is created by the use of the C section when the song suddenly changes to first person. This is where, for example, *SF Sorrow* by Pretty Things or Pink Floyd's *The Wall* fails to deliver as rock operas – they don't have characters set up against each other.

In reference to the sound box, how the instrumentation is placed in the mix only creates the staging of the drama produced in the musical values that the instruments inhabit.

Musically the song showcases its genre signatures. The introducing verses and the repeated first verse at the end is clearly rock music, arranged by the individual instrumentalist's capabilities and how they have learned to play together. It is in other words the classic Who - sound – the melodic bassline, rhythmic guitar playing and anarchistic drumming, playing fills everywhere in the style of the break between the first and second verse. The other sections have feel to them of being pre-arranged, adding to the operatic feel of the album, the father section being a good example. Yet the mockery is never far away and the choir in the A section is an obvious reference to traditional operas background singing.

At the same time the mockery is, as previously argued, directed both ways. The sections containing rock are good but they are clearly enhanced by the sections containing the more operatic elements. The operatic sections are shot into the song, they come out of nowhere, yet making the rock sections seem more rock than had the song been without them. Here we encounter one of this records' crowning achievements, which is that despite inserting their music with operatic elements and recontextualizing rock, The Who actually managed to stay by their rock genre and come out the other end of an opera experiment as a rock band, unlike The Beatles and their aforementioned *Sgt Pepper* album, which contains precious little rock, actually resembling music hall.

It is also noteworthy that the different sections could easily been identified without their respective lyrics. We don't need to know the action of the words to understand the action of

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the song. Action is a little hard to define but I shall give an example from my experience as an actor⁹⁰.

In 2005 I was part of a production of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* as an actor. Our director was a professional from New York and we had worked with him before on various projects. One obstacle we had to address when working with him was the language and how to successfully produce a play where the director has little knowledge of the stage language being used. In an early rehearsal he set up a simple yet effective test. The opening of *Taming of the Shrew* is a little known story that is usually cut from contemporary productions. It's about a small town drunk, Christopher Sly who is fooled into believing he's a king. Danish/Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg later borrowed and developed this little story into a full comedy play called *Jeppe på Bierget*.

Our task was as to act out the story of *Jeppe på Bierget* without words or lines. Our director watched and wrote down the story from our performance. To everybody's surprise, it took four attempts of going through the story until we managed to tell the whole story.

What he wanted to tell us with this little exercise was that he always wanted to understand the action of a play regardless of the spoken stage language, and that "stage language" is different from spoken language, and that words alone is not enough for a dramatic work. This, by the way, is why theatre studies is not the study of language.

This, I believe, can be transferred to pop music, both recorded and performed. In "Christmas", the music is in itself a fully dramatic work, separated from the songs' lyrical content. The lyrics merely underline what is already there in the music performed. Through how it's written and performed, we understand the action of the song. This is why the songs on Neil Young's *Greendale* don't work; they lack the musical drama needed for us to read it as a story, the action of the songs are thus underdeveloped and unfinished. "Christmas" has this action, this dramatic thrust, and though it may not be the best, or most noted song on the album, it's perhaps one of the better attempts at writing rock opera on this record.

⁹⁰ This method was described in one of my earlier undergraduate works titled "Kjære Landsmenn", concerning the pop lyric language debate that pops up in Norway every now and then: Andersen, Martin Nordahl (2009) *MUS4601 Kjære Landsmenn! Semesteroppgave*, UiO

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From this, one would perhaps expect, judging by the above analysis and general set up of this thesis, the music to explain, enhance or at least develop the final definition of rock opera. It doesn't. Not quite. On the contrary – the musical elements in this song only adds to the confusion, causing further fascination and questions about what rock opera is or can be. Does that mean that the quest for the rock opera grail has grind to a halt or that I, the popular music student Knight has been eaten by the Rabbit of Caerbannog?

Absolutely not. This thesis is not about one song or one lyric, one recording or one performance. Our current understanding of *Tommy*, though originating from the original album, is made up by a web of listening experiences, concerts, films, interviews and tv appearances. Opera is a theatrical experience, and taking into consideration that The Who were once considered the greatest live band on earth, I'll leave the original album behind for a little while, instead taking a left turn, plunging head first and with tight trousers into the dark wings and sad tears of rock theatre studies.

*"Ultimately, the Who provided all the ingredients required in the psychedelic age, but their music- certainly onstage- began to conform to what we would now describe as a unique form of high-energy rock and roll, an imaginative and individual music that avoided the recognition of any limitations but stayed equally faithful to the basic excitement of the form"*⁹¹

3.0 Underture

3.1 *Do you think it's alright? The Who and Tommy Live*

My little simple theory at the beginning of this thesis, argued that popular music can be read and understood as the basis for performance or modern theatre. A rock concert certainly falls under the umbrella of public performance.

The work on European theatre history of Jon Nygaard⁹² is the literature that introduced me to the reading of the history of the theatre that would pan between what he calls official and unofficial forms of theatre. This is what I think he got right: That our western understanding

⁹¹ Atkins 2000: 99

⁹² Nygaard 1996 vol I-III

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of the word "theatre" as referring to what we commonly identify as theatre must be reconsidered to include all forms of performance. Just like musicology has been "forced" to accept popular music as a form of music worth studying, I read this as a call to find and discuss contemporary forms of performances to include in the theatre studies, thus helping to carve out a new understanding and broaden our conception of the word theatre.

Nygaards reading of European theatre history makes a point in describing the way certain forms of theatre moves from unofficial to official forms of theatre through political and economic changes. He demonstrates that throughout the European theatre history, unofficial theatrical events such as rituals have sometimes been adapted and redefined as theatre in a different social setting. It's like seeing a Native American dance in the street for money: it may be the same dance as has been performed through centuries, but the street audience share no reference to what is being performed. As such it becomes theatre, where there is a gap between what is being performed and the original authentic meaning of the performance.

This theoretical framework I would like to adapt to the rock stage history and *Tommy* (as a performance piece) as I think the rock stage art history demonstrates this better than any other form of performance. My angle towards the theatre history and theory is the holistic view. I find it very hard to perceive and theorize about theatre as an autonomous form of art. This is because I believe the status of the theatre is at any given time defined by the society in which it operates, no matter the play or playwright. An aspect which has always fascinated me about a play, which is that the status of the theatre or a certain play can all of a sudden change within that given society. What was once a powerful performance may now be yesterday's news because the social framework in which the performance flourished is gone today.

This is politically charged way of looking at theatre history, and it is one that should be looked at with some precaution, but politically not necessarily in the sense that a play or performance as a tool for change society, but that a performance can sometimes mirror the audience in a way that they can see themselves through performance. I must also here stress that, in this context, the word "change" isn't another word for "improvement".

Based what sources are writing about the original tour and early performances of The Who and *Tommy* , most notably the writings of Marsh, I shall look at the performances through the

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writings of Richard Schechner and his theories concerning the following ingredients of such an event⁹³:

Performance: the outer overall framework in which the event is taking place.

Theater: what the performers do during the performance.

Script: the performance manual, the code of the event.

Drama: the entity that ultimately drives the other elements.

With this in mind, I shall take a look at two performances of *Tommy*; one from studying the audio material of the now famous Leeds and Hull shows with the original lineup during the *Tommy* tour, and one given by Roger Daltrey and band in Royal Albert Hall in 2011.

I shall try to explain the original performance and why it had such impact it had, and later trace the different incarnations of *Tommy* in order to explain my experience at the Daltrey 2011 version, through looking at symbolism vs. phenomenology, and the construction of authenticity in the theatre part from the four elements listed above. I shall link this up to theatre theory and see if there is a connection to be made. But before our hero enters the stage, there is a backdrop to be painted.

The theatre backdrop in the history of The Who is that in all the literature I've gathered for this work, there seems to be a general consensus that *Tommy*, although a great rock album on its own, really came to life and was done real justice, when performed live as a rock show. There are very few nice words about the movie, no particular interest in the 1993 Broadway production, and even a general disinterest in the original album, but everybody seems to agree that as a live show, *Tommy* somehow turned everything around. Dave Marsh, in particular, eagerly stresses its importance in the history of rock performance:

"Tommy was a rock ritual. The Who enacted it on stage in a way that deemphasized the plot, accenting the music and the gestures of performance. You no more needed to know the words to "See Mee Feel Me" or Pinball Wizard to understand what the Who were saying no more

⁹³ see Schechner 2003:71 for a full and detailed account

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than you needed to know Latin to comprehend the Mass. You didn't even need to be a rock fan."⁹⁴

What he's saying is this: *Tommy* only made perfect sense when used as a platform and vessel for a live performance. Further, what you hear on the original album was not reproduced rigorously: they changed it around to work as a stage language. Perhaps the most striking claim is that you didn't even need to know the album in order to understand it.

From this I can further derive that the album *Tommy*, in theatre language (intentionally or not), is a manuscript or what Schechner calls a "performance map" for a rock performance.

What kind of performance is rock performance, and is a rock performance even slightly of interest as part of theatre studies? What is interesting to me as a theater theorist is the first sentence: *Tommy* was a rock ritual. Marsh's words may seem pompous, but here and there in his account of the Who's history, are drops of theatrical/performance related claims on behalf of *Tommy*:

*"Tommy was a myth that summarizes the most transcendent aspirations of the generation Townshend had been portraying since he began writing."*⁹⁵

The story on the album does wear signs of classic mythology, but this was at the time of writing (Marsh is writing in 1983) somewhat unusual, and I have yet to see similar claims to other rock records as being myths. To sum up briefly: in the interpretation of the original performance we are being presented with two words that go hand in hand in theatre theory: *Myth* and *ritual*.

A *ritual* is usually accepted as the origins of theatre or at least one of theatre's earliest incarnations⁹⁶. Because of my fascination with the myth/ritual theory and their function as theatrical events/performances, If *Tommy* can be connected to myth and ritual, a couple of definitions never hurt. A ritual is a geographically closed, time – defined event that has been created by a certain group of people to enhance, evoke or define certain gods, goods or values through performance or doing. *Myth*, or mythology, is the meaning of that doing or performance, the framework or guideline to that particular ritual.

⁹⁴ Marsh 1983: 344

⁹⁵ Marsh 1983: 334

⁹⁶ Further discussions on theatre origins theory, see Bockett/Hildy 2003:p1- 5 or Schechner 2003: chapter one.

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Tommy bears sings of classical mythology and rituals in its plot structure. We are presented with the story of a protagonist as the "chosen" one, as seen in many popular culture texts. Examples of these would for instance be Jesus, Harry Potter and Luke Skywalker. Our very own Tommy Walker has many things in common with these characters; Being the center of special attention from their birth, and they are expected to fulfill extraordinary predictions, participate in unusual actions or being a character deemed to deliver the rest of the world of evil cast upon it.

At one point in the mythical plot, they are sent in to an "underworld" in which they discover or uncover more about themselves by going through different tests. Harry Potter has to go a school, Luke Skywalker must go to see Yoda to train as a Jedi, and Tommy is by the trauma of seeing his fathers' death sent into "himself", being rendered deaf, dumb and blind. It is in this state he's being sent through different trials, such as the encounters with the Acid Queen, his Cousin Kevin and Uncle Ernie.

They all come out the other end as changed persons, and the key to the ritual/mythology meta-narrative plot is that it describes irreversible transformation. Coming-of-age rituals celebrate the transformation from child to adult, a wedding ritual describes the transformation from two persons to one entity and so on.

Tommy, as a reflection of its audience, described in its early incarnation the creation of identity for a new generation (the post-war kids) and the performance of *Tommy* can be the reflection of that identity creation.

But theatre and rituals is ultimately something that is done .i.e. we must look at *Tommy* and The Who's performance of it both as ritual and a reenactment of that ritual as theatre.

Through analyzing the concerts as rituals this section also draw upon the myth/ritual studies which at the moment proclaims that the myth and ritual originate and evolve together (Segal:) And with that in mind, into the performance space we go.

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3.2 Fiddle About – Tommy as “unofficial” theatre

First, there's the unofficial event. Unofficial as in a theatrical event not yet accepted or identified as a theatrical event by the theatre institutions, critics, or handlers. At this point in rock performance, there's no standard performance space, which was probably down to the lack of a standard dramaturgy of a rock show. Rock production equipment as we know it and expect today, such as PA systems, we're only beginning to find a form, and there were no rules or regulations about how loud a concert could be played.

Let me first look at the *outer framework* of the concert: Such an event would for example be the show The Who played at the refectory at Leeds University, the one at Hull the day after or the now legendary show at Woodstock in August 1969⁹⁷. The audiences at these shows were made up by youngsters, probably baby-boomers the same age as their heroes on stage, from 20-25 years of age. The size of the crowd is also relatively small (Woodstock was, and will always be, an exception), the band in those days used to work at venues with a capacity of around 5000. As the concert hall is not that big, the band and the audience are able to interact and feed off each other. If listened to closely, *Live at Leeds* is an album that not only documents the band in full force, it also shows a band working in close relationship with the audience in a way that is sort of lost. Again, it's probably down to their comedy skills. The Leeds show is longer than Hull the day after, simply because of a curfew with the result of a relaxed and witty band. Since the venue was small, they were able to act in front of the audience, and reach the whole audience without the help of large screens. In fact, the *Live at Leeds* record is a historic document, not only of The Who, but the way a rock show worked after it had become too big for clubs, and before it entered the dreaded stadium. And it was recorded just in time to capture on tape the band with its original audience.

Then there's the "*acting*" or *theatre*. Throughout their career, The Who has been perceived as THE authentic band, as if all they ever did were "real". On a closer look, however, this might not be entirely true. If one looks at the Colosseum film from the *Kilburn* DVD, there is clear evidence that they're using some physical and verbal bits to augment their performance. Out of these, only a few have survived through the years.

⁹⁷ For further discussions about these events see Classic Rock December 2010: Farren, Mick: "The Guitar is not loud enough!"

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The "windmill" is perhaps the number one theatrical device connected to The Who and is Pete Townshend's number one trick: He raises the arm over his head, swings it back and hits the strings on the guitar on an upwards movement. He did it, and still does it in a speed which made it and makes it impossible to take your eyes off him. The effect it caused by the circular movement in the arm causing his body to appear as a target. The speed in which this must be done (try it out yourself!) also alerts us to think that there's something wrong: an arm swinging like that sends out an aura of real danger, a sense of something being horribly wrong.

That, in combination with Moon's erratic drum fills, Daltrey's swinging microphone and Entwistle's flashy bass lines, The Who was a band that was impossible not to look at - a group where each member were juggling and clowning for the audience's attention through fierce competition.

Looking back at it through the mediation of audio and visual recordings it is of course hard to successfully identify this in a phenomenological framework, but at the time the band was not representing other than what they were doing that night, and the theatrical actions had, as I can see it today, no other frame of reference other than that of inter-performance relations, such as Townshend doing the windmill to steal get attention from Moon's stage antics, causing drama and tension between the band characters on stage.

Looking at the footage of the original band from the aforementioned concerts you get the impression of a form of theatrical event thought long lost on the world, only written about in the dreams of theatre theorists. These days, in a "classic" play or theatrical performance, there's usually a shifting focus. Character A speaks after character B. Character C reacts to this conversation by killing himself, while characters A and B, watches in amusement. They then finish their conversation. In modern theatre, interrupting another actors' focus is usually frowned upon and if you ever see it happening in a play you can bet it was carefully planned.

The Who on the other hand, worked the stage like a renaissance painting or if you will, an opera: everything going on at the same time, never leaving time for the eye to rest on one member of the band. It's probably easier to do so today, but only because the films we are watching of the band have been edited with us in mind. Judging from the Hull show for

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example, I can say with some conviction that you could follow one member, but would then miss the wholeness of the stage performance.

There's another layer of the performance that rarely gets attention. Who do you see when you go see The Who? The obvious answer would be that you, under the banner of authenticity, are seeing The Who – Roger Daltrey, Pete Townshend, Keith Moon and John Entwistle. It is, however, not that simple.

The Who were a product of their time, and a product of their audience. Not only is the performance of the Who for them, the significance and importance of the performance is produced within the audience, the members of The Who, merely acting out "The Who", the band the audience has produced in their heads and come to expect at concerts. Pete HAVE to do the windmill, Roger MUST swing his microphone etc. otherwise it's not a proper Who show. From that angle, the audience didn't see Pete Townshend as much as they were watching "Pete Townshend". In front of the audience, Pete Townshend will always be "Pete Townshend" in the sense that he only appears to them on a stage coming out from a backstage area. In other words, we are looking at the rock stage show as a carefully produced, carefully acted illusion, giving it a theatrical thrust jazz or classical concerts have never had.

This is because we connect with the band as the characters we perceive them to be. Anyone meeting their rock heroes in real life (like I have numerous times) can confirm that the person was not who they thought he/she was. Like in rituals, the stage performers are there to guide, not the minds of the fellow musicians, but to guide the audience through what Marsh so daringly called "the rock ritual".

The tool to guiding the band and audience through such an event is a functioning dramaturgy, an arch, a musical tension-and release. When they started having hits, the band used song about teenage angst and male frustration, like "I Can't Explain", "The Kids are Alright", and "My Generation". Those were effective in being the soundtrack to the first wave of teenagers in Britain after the war. As I see it, the *Tommy* – album bases itself on that same frustration, but manages to say things more elegantly and mature. In this context, the music of *Tommy* is the *script or performance map* of the performance.

When they reach the moment in the rock opera where the father is singing "*Tommy can you hear me?*" it hits a nerve with the audience, an audience not used to be able to fully

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communicate with their parents' generation. Here the stage show (based on what I've seen on tape) would take an interesting turn as this would be a rare moment of centered focus, in this example being on the father. This is followed by Tommy's "*See Me, Touch Me...*" –segment, in which the song digs deeper into the character, thus digging further into the audience.

The audience is thus under the spell of double illusion; one is the band member characters, the other is the character in the plot. They would that night in Leeds see "Roger Daltrey" singing the role of *Tommy*, and "Pete Townshend" singing the part of the father.

This song, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, is the first song in which we encounter the Tommy character, and it is the first song in the whole work to feature dramatic characterization. The effect is that in a performance, this is the first song in which *Tommy* becomes truly *dramatic*, thus being the moment the performance becomes opera – or rock opera. We have reached the point where we see Tommy as a mythical hero as a character for the young to identify with and embrace. The *Tommy* character is what brings to the ritual, through a shared understanding between performer and audience, a *meaning*.

This is the description of the "unofficial" version of events. At the time, a concert at Leeds University prefectory was not considered to be theatre, an unofficial theatrical event will always be identified as such in hindsight. I am, sitting here 42 years down the road, trying to unlock the mysteries of a show long gone. Speculations? Perhaps so, but my experiences as a concert attendant and working musician tells me that I'm not far from getting the story right.

It is also the unofficial reading of the meaning of the event, or how the myth served the ritual at the time it was released. At the time of the show, both performer and audience have prepared. The performer on what to do. The audience member has probably heard through the album and/or some old singles. How the audience is prepared has been the basis of many discussions backstage on my various projects. It always leads to heated discussions about wanting to play unfamiliar material to both spectator and musician, versus squeezing out the old top ten hits. However, judging by the applause following Townshend's introduction of *Tommy* on disc two of *Live at Leeds*, we can say with a fair amount of confidence, that the audience that night knew *Tommy* very well, and were anxious to hear it.

Tommy, or the performance of it, would be a culturally important event, not only for The Who, but for the then short history of rock stage art, and would be a touchstone for rock

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shows to come. Alas, The Who would never again be as entertaining or shall I say mocking in the way they presented their songs, as *Tommy* took them from being underground to household names in just two years, making them somewhat "official".

3.3 Pinball Wizard – the performance evolves

It didn't take long for *Tommy* to make it to the official theatre. It was produced as a professional stage production at the Seattle opera as early as 1971, the year after the Who tour ended. The following year, 1972, saw the release of an orchestrated version, arranged by Lou Reizner, which further helped moving the work from being a novelty and into something to recognize as a serious work (I say this, knowing that the original version was also serious).

Then, in 1975, came the by far most debated version, the Ken Russel movie⁹⁸. To anyone reading this paper, and who might be Who fans and fans of this particular version, I hereby apologize for not having seen the movie all the way through in one go. I have tried, though, *many* times – it's just that it's not a very good movie, despite some good efforts here and there. The Pinball Wizard segment in particular is fantastic, but Eric Clapton's "Eyesight to the blind" is the opposite – embarrassing to everyone involved in the scene.

A musical version has also seen the light of day, and is popping up here and there every now and then. It opened on Broadway in 1993 to modest success, and also had a run in London. Both productions were met with mixed reviews⁹⁹. It's interesting to note that music that was once thought of as a work under the musical heading, clearly didn't fit the musical format. The album from the American stage production of *Tommy* is hard to listen to for a rock fan, as the rock element is totally lost.

I'm listing these and the following incarnations of the work to illustrate that over the years, *Tommy* has undergone a transformation. From underground theatrical event for the baby boomers and hippies to a work placed as a serious body of music and lyrics, analyzed and written about as part of our western cultural heritage. This would again change the way it's

⁹⁸ Russel, Ken (director)(1975, DVD 2010): *Tommy The Movie*, B00028HCD8 Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

⁹⁹ For more info and easy overview of the Tommy history see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_\(album\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_(album))

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being listened to, as rock opera now has become a familiar label, no longer inhabiting a mocking quality either upwards or downwards.

Judging from the aforementioned tapes from the 1974-76 tours, the *Tommy* segment from those shows is an entertaining venture, though lacking the 1970 tour's dynamics and innocence. The band is full on but it sounds like an assault rather than a reading, and there seems to be little communicating with the audience from the stage. The audience had also changed as the group had become the biggest rock act of the day, pulling enormous crowds wherever they went. They were certainly feeding the then unknown need for rock nostalgia. These were not the band's original audience, a lot of them coming in from the success of the movie and as a result the communication of songs was different.

One theatrical element needs special mention. On this tour, Keith Moon played the part of Uncle Ernie, as he had done in the Russel film. On the original album, and the subsequent tour, John Entwistle sang this song with a dead-pan voice, giving the naughty uncle an eerie, creepy aura. The quality in his performance of this character, live and on record, is forgotten only because of Moon's full on, dark comedy incarnation, taking full advantage of the character making him both dangerous and burlesque.

The next incarnation of *Tommy* from the The Who themselves has been the subject of many heated discussions in the Who-fan communities. The 1989 25th Anniversary tour has been dubbed "The Who On Ice" by the fan base as they opted for using Simon Phillips on drums, a huge horn section, extra percussionists and backup-singers. The "On Ice" tag is justified in as much as they made little effort in recreating the sound of the original band or the *Tommy* recording – the line up clearly lacked the authenticity of being a Who tour – but as I see it, this criticism is valid only if we compare the 1989 line up to the original one. The Who "On Ice", taken on its own was actually a good tour, and marked the return of the band after a seven year hiatus. Roger's voice was in fine shape, Pete started playing guitar again and John was as good as he ever was¹⁰⁰. The live album *Join Together* was my way into *Tommy* and the shows are pretty good in my ears. The interesting thing about this tour in this context however, is how it cemented The Who as rock and roll royalty – a big lump of professional

¹⁰⁰ This way of touring The Who – with an extended line-up – was continued through to the Quadrophenia tour in 1996-97 with one major change: Zak Starkey replaced Phillips on the drums.

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rock and roll showbiz showed into huge arenas and stadiums. *Live at Leeds* was indeed far away.

This doesn't have to be a bad thing, though. In fact, the band and their audience have gone through many phases together, and the concert ritual has stayed more or less the same throughout these years, no matter the size of the stadiums. Sure, seeing your favorite band at a small venue is preferred by almost any music fan I know, and musicians prefer this too. A sign though that the rock concert ritual had morphed into another being can be found not on the stage or in the music played, but in the concert hall or what I've so far referred to as the outer frames of the performance. More specifically, the problem is found in *the seating* history of rock.

In the early days of the rock and roll concert, the audience was one group, usually representing the young, baby boomer generation. The concert hall was found not constructed, and the tickets were priced so that the young could afford one without too much trouble. In many ways, the early rock stage seating politics were reminiscent of Elizabethan theatre practices. The cheap 5 pence a ticket, standing room in the front, and the more expensive boxes at the back (if boxes at all in the rock tradition). Festivals today carry this tradition, as there is one admission fee for all attendants.

In the boxes, the aristocracy would look and pay more attention to each other than what was going on onstage. From the nineteenth century this changed. From then on, the most attractive seats were those in the front, pushing the everyman back and up on the balcony. As a result the prices then and now reflect the seating politics, as the front row tickets usually are the double of those in the back.

Interestingly, the rock concert has undergone the same change in ticket politics. When Kiss toured Europe in 2008, the front row tickets were priced at a staggering 1000£. This included meet and greet with the band, t-shirt and some other memorabilia, exclusive to those ticket holders. As a regular ticket holder I found myself thinking of the consequences of such politics. For the regular fan, a whooping 1000£ is way passed any normal, sensible spending budget, and as a result, the regular fan, the fan that has all the records just as much as the rich guy in the front, is being completely excluded from buying this kind of ticket, on the basis of his economical, and consequently, social status. I might be a little harsh here, but the example

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is true. This being said, there are still bands that play arenas with the old ticket politics or with standing room only.

The seating policy described has been the trend over the last twenty years at least with bands of Kiss or The Who's stature. I've seen The Who play in the states twice, in Irwine, CA in 2000, and in Chicago 2002. Both venues were roughly the same: seats in the front, standing in the back – the total opposite of what I expected. At the Irwine show I had lawn tickets (yes, coming all the way from Norway I bought lawn tickets) simply because I thought the ones in front were too expensive. It must be said though, as I'm a fan of safe audience environment, that this seating makes the whole event much safer and relaxed.

There is I think, a fine line between charging fans for tickets and charging them so much you alter the demography of your audience. Are the ones in front at such events really the ones you want in the front row?

My point with bringing this up, is that, seen through the holistic reading of theatre history, as the seating politics changes, so does the meaning and social status of the event. This happens because the money you set aside for this kind of spending will ultimately reflect your economy status. Without changing the actual music played or the moves performed, the agreement between performer and audience about the meaning of the performance is being blurred.

The problem is enhanced by another element. As discussed in above, the members of The Who not only enacted their parts in an opera, but also enacting or representing the image of themselves like Pete Townshend as "Pete Townshend". The official version of an event is a replica of the original event but with an extra theatrical device at work but is the artists the same? In an email interview on www.thewho.com, Pete Townshend shed some light on the premises of his part in playing in a band called The Who:

"I am no longer a member of a band called 'The Who'. I am Pete Townshend. I used to be in a band called 'The Who'. It does not exist today except in your dreams. I am a song-writer and guitarist who – if I create the right setting – can walk onto a stage with my old buddy Roger Daltrey and evoke the old magic of The Who in the dreams of the audience. It never

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becomes The Who in my dreams. I'm so sorry, it never happens for me. I think it may happen sometimes for Roger – you'll have to press him for an answer"¹⁰¹

Townshend here describes three theatrical layers that's needed for a Who-show to function today. First there's the man himself, Pete Townshend, a person the audience rarely gets to see, and to the majority of fans he exists only as a rock actor. Second, it's the person we've seen so many times on stage, and video, which is "Pete Townshend". Third, there's the present "Pete Townshend" trying to emulate the "Pete Townshend" we know and love from videos and movies, cd's and records. The degree of authenticity of a Who show today is determined by to what degree the original members are able to simulate their past appearance and stage antics, not by acting out what they would have wanted to represent them.

In other words, the transformation from unofficial to official theatrical event is found in the reversed expectation of authenticity or in the shift from a phenomenological to a symbolic performance. If you went to see The Who in their original incarnation, you wanted and expected to see and hear new and groundbreaking material and you got to see the band perform it with an awesome show. When you see them today, you want them to play old hits and music that was groundbreaking forty years ago accompanied by a replication of the old show.

To me, the interesting part here is how Townshend insists that the illusion only takes place in the mind of the audience - which brings me to suggest that they too, with the help of the act on stage, are under the spell of multi-layered performance.

First, there is the fans themselves, these days made up of people from all walks of life. Just being themselves. This is true today as rock fans really can be found in every corner of society, not just in the demography of youngsters. Even for young artists, the audience is a mix between young and old people.

Then there's the same bunch of people in a venue/arena attending a Who show. Inside the perimeters of the arena, they together become a Who audience who act out and behave as a rock audience should behave. The third dimension can sometimes be observed when someone

¹⁰¹ Townshend/Lee: *Townshend interview*, online (accessed 01.02.08):
http://www.thewho.com/index.php?module=news&news_item_id=60

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is trying to act out how the audience behaved in the old days. In Who terms, this usually manifests itself in someone in the front row shouting "Get on with it!" in between songs to heckle the band. Other marks of "third dimension behavior" would include throwing empty beer containers, stage diving, stage invasion, and dressing up in vintage clothing, like Kiss audience members dress up in vintage Kiss costumes.

A Kiss concert is always entertaining in one way or the other but the audience behavior and costume dress up has always demonstrated the audience layers in a brutal yet hilarious way. When inside the performance space, let's say Oslo Spectrum, walking around in a well - made Kiss costume is rather cool, and being inside one you'll probably feel like the star amongst the audience. This is possible because of the performance framework allowing this to be normal.

When entering the Oslo Train Central to go home to Hamar however and the costume is rather embarrassing maybe disclosing any dents or mistakes you might have made on the costume. I find this part of a Kiss performance to be a very entertaining one, and after a Kiss show I always rush to Oslo Train Central to watch "Gene Simmons" discover that he's standing in Oslo Train Central wearing a very stupid costume. Once outside the perimeters of the performance the costume is worthless. The look in fans' eyes when they discover this is priceless.

This is rare though, and usually the audiences never have to, or feel the need to act out more than the first extra layer of performance. The performers on stage, though, must, and the current touring version of The Who creates a great case for performance layer/authenticity studies.

In this case, if taking the above quote from Townshend seriously, the success of the old and the new Who, rests on the groups' ability to construct multiple layers of authenticity for the audience to identify with. In his quote, we also see an authenticity problem or tension. If we follow Allan Moore¹⁰², the artist on stage performs a first person authenticity while at the same time representing the third person authenticity as needed by the audience in order for them to call the performance "the real thing". In a rock performance context this would for example mean to play the guitar that feels right for the performer that is also the one the

¹⁰² Moore, Allan: *Authenticity as Authentication*, 2002, online (accessed 24.10.11) <http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/1958/1/fulltext.pdf>, Cambridge University Press

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audience wants you to play. Like Ace Frehley of Kiss must play the Les Paul. The audience would have reacted had he showed up one night with a Fender Telecaster or a Tokai.

As an audience member I have witnessed an authenticity layer hiccup a couple of times, one of them was recent when the Doobie Brothers opened for ZZ Top in Oslo Spectrum in October of 2010. The lead singer had short hair, moustache, and an overall straight look – he looked nothing like in the pictures of the band or not really rock in general. He even sported a PRS electric guitar, normally not associated with rock guitar players. I thought he looked weird until I adjusted my expectations of authenticity – in fact, he was more “real” than I was, looking like he wanted to look, playing the guitar he wanted to play. I was in my seat trying to be cool with my ZZ Top T-shirt. That night I became a Doobie Brothers fan.



Roger Daltrey's famous silhouette.

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3.4 There's a Doctor! The "official" event in Royal Albert Hall

Even though describing earlier incarnations of *Tommy* gives us ideas of how the music and audience interacted, I think it would be fitting to recall some of my own memories about this music.

Since the 2002 North American Tour, a typical Who show has ended with a medley from *Tommy*: "Pinball Wizard", "Amazing Journey/Sparks", "See Me, Feel Me/Listening To You". When put together like this, the songs make up a kind of miniature *Tommy* that builds up to the finale of "Listening To You". The segment has never changed and has wowed people unknown to the music at every show I've attended, like the 2007 Roskilde show I wrote about earlier.

As the work on this thesis progressed I thought it would be insufficient to write about *Tommy* as rock opera without having experienced it in its entirety. If the *Tommy* segment from previous tours taught us something, it would be that very few of these songs can be performed as standalone songs, with the possible exception of "Pinball Wizard" and "I'm Free". On the 2000 tour, which was billed as a "greatest hits"-tour, they only played "Pinball Wizard". The music on *Tommy* demands to be performed as a whole or in a large chunk. The reason for this is that the music on the *Tommy* songs are so vastly different from that in the songs from their later period, which they are now mostly associated with. If they decide to play songs from *Tommy*, like "Fiddle About", they need to anticipate it with another song to escort the audience into another tonal territory. The encore segment from that last tours work because they open it with "Pinball Wizard". It immediately transport the audience, which I here assume is a devoted Who audience) to mental framework build up by years of accumulating Who images and sound.

When they play songs from *Tommy*, Who fans naturally think of the famous Woodstock scene where the sun rise just as they play "See Me, Feel Me", the Daltrey silhouette captured on numerous photos when he holds his hands above his head as he prepares to sing THAT line (See me...), the colorful *Tommy* movie and the Elton John segment in particular to name a few. But most importantly, considering that the *Tommy* songs contain plot within the musical

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and lyrical framework, the *Tommy* segment transports the show from meta-narrative to a narrative performance.

Early in 2011 I was one of the lucky Who fans who got to attend a concert with Roger Daltrey and his band in Royal Albert Hall, London. The show was part of the annual Teenage Cancer Trust concert series, a fundraiser for the building of hospital wards for teenagers with cancer. I shall now take a closer look at this show as I feel that the show and an analysis of it could be a fitting finale to my thesis as I finally can say that I've seen a show with a large chunk of *Tommy* songs in it, in fact it is the largest chunk of *Tommy* songs ever performed.

First, there's the location and *outer framework of the performance*. As in 2002 I found myself scraping the barrel (or begging the girlfriend) to have the money to go to the show. Again, if one is supposed to be pragmatic about it, setting aside money to go and see such a show is horribly stupid, but I do so never the less. In fact, going to see the Who in London has become an annual event for me (and my newly broke girlfriend): They played a show at the Indigo2 in December 2008, Royal Albert Hall in March 2010 and now Daltrey in 2011. Rumors have it that a 2010 tour of *Quadrophenia* is in the pipe, but as this is being written (October 2011) nothing is confirmed but I will hopefully be there no matter the material they decide to play: I am a big fan and have succumbed to the idea that I'm hopelessly so, going to see them whenever they see it if to drag the old Who show out on the road. But it's probably cheaper to go to Elverum for an elk – burger.

Attending a show with The Who in London *is* special: It's their home territory, a ground zero for their career, and where they played many memorable shows during their initial tenure as a band. The Royal Albert hall is part of that history, most notable for the fact that they got banned from playing there in the sixties. It's also in London where they found their first audience, the audience they so elegantly mirrored in *Tommy* - some of whom were probably in the audience with me that night – that laid the foundation for their later success. I make a mention of this because it adds to the anticipation of the show, outer wholeness or meta-narrative of the event.

As for the *theatre/theatric* part of the evening, the band was made up by professionals, hired not to be a "gang" as bands usually are, but hired to recreate the sound of another band. One member in particular had a special role in the authenticity framework of this band, a role that

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was in reference to performance and sheer stage presence and not so much his musical skills. On guitars and backing vocals that night was Simon Townshend, younger brother of Pete Townshend. Simon has since the 2002 been a regular fixture in the Who touring band, and is the one member that gave the audience a marker of authenticity and continuity with the Who touring band.

Behind the band is a large screen showing animation made to fit and represent each song and each theme in the song. Unlike in the *Quadrophenia* - show, the projections are used passively to enhance the pace of the show, and not used as a dramatic tool. The band never stops for a film to finish, the animations are just there, you follow them or you don't. The animations themselves are fantastic, some of the best I've seen in a stage show like this. The segment during "Fiddle About" is brilliantly solved, showing slow, animated photos of dismembered dolls falling down stairs. The band behind Daltrey may not be much to look at, but visually the show is a feast. Every segment is different, with a different take on what the song album wants to say in that particular song. In that sense, the animations reflect the album, in that although it may lack a beginning-to-end thread, it simultaneously makes perfect sense. At the end of the show, Daltrey takes the opportunity to thank some students in the audience for the animations. It would seem that each song's video has been made by different group.

The rest of the band gave, as one would expect from such professionals, a fantastic performance, but never did anything out of their role as backing musicians, no one, not even the other guitar player. The evening clearly belonged to Daltrey as the sole carrier of personally communicating with the audience. I can't remember the names of anybody in the band, not even the drummer, who did a great job at replicating Keith Moon's drum parts.

The show is being billed as *Tommy plus Who-classics*. The title of the show arguably announces old, well known music, which means that Who fans such as myself can dust off old records and live recordings to try to pre-imagine the show. Further investigating the show beforehand reveals that Daltrey and the band will play the whole of *Tommy* from beginning to end, with only the instrumental "Underture" left out of the proceedings. To play the album like that has never been done before, but the 1989 tour was pretty close, on which "Welcome" was also cut.

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This sort of show, where a band or artist play a whole record back to back is something that has emerged in the last few years, and it has added an interesting dramaturgical thrust to the usual rock stage art, which used to consist of the band choosing the best material fit to a well paced son

By playing whole albums you end up playing songs that are fillers and even not that good, and playing songs in an order that was okay for the album but not a show. For instance, when A-HA played their first two albums in Oslo Konserthus in 2010 they opened with the usual showstopper "Take On Me". The effect of this sort of show is that it changes the pace and overall structure of the event: the content of the show has a distinct beginning, middle and ending, that is worked out beforehand on the record.

This was also the case with The Who and during the *Tommy* tour, that the album was played from start to finish, although "Underture" was cut and to my knowledge never played, "Cousin Kevin", "Welcome" and "Sally Simpson" were tried but dropped sometime during the tour. As the record was being worked on up until the last minute before release, the pace and structuring were probably felt to be unfinished and it opened for the band to tighten and restructure this as they ended up doing during the tour.

In addition to this, it was announced that the album was to be played as it was. All of the instrumentations and arrangements, vocal harmonies and vocal parts were to be completely reconstructed. This had at time, never been done before. A close listen to the tapes from Leeds, Hull, Isle Of Wight and Amsterdam, reveals that the vocal arrangements were lost in the madness of the Who show. This was something I was looking forward to hear, because the original lineup of The Who was a fine vocal group, capable of doing vocal arrangements just as complex and fluidly as The Beach Boys. One just has to listen to the single "I can see for Miles" to hear the potential. On the live DVD from Tanglewood¹⁰³ they actually get most of the vocal harmonies wrong, especially during "1921". Just by that song, it's not hard to understand why that show was has been deemed unsuitable for further release.

The show starts with *Tommy*. On the original tour, the *Tommy* section was always preceded with old singles to warm both the band and audience up – not just physically, but also

¹⁰³ The Who (unknown year of print): *Tangled up in Who*, PENG 15 Penguin DVD

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

psychologically – as a means to get the band and audience connect with the occasion. In reference to pre-imagining the show, I must say that I was a little surprised by that start. Not because we didn't get a proper warm up, but because *Tommy* is very demanding on the voice, and that Daltrey, now in his mid - sixties, would have benefited greatly from a couple of songs before *Tommy*. As a band, warming up with familiar songs also allows you to fix any sound problems you might have on stage.

Plunging straight into *Tommy* also derived us the opportunity of experiencing *Tommy* following early two-minute singles and how the show stood out from other rock show formats. This is not without significance: the early singles (or other songs for that matter) would establish the standard characterization of the band or band member, in this case Roger Daltrey. By starting with *Tommy*, we don't get to see the transformation from characterization in stand-alone songs to the characterization and musical drama discussed in the previous section. That said, as a longtime fan, I had checked facts from his warm up show and knew what I was in for, but later shows that summer revealed that he sometimes opened with a cluster of classic songs as to "land" on stage.

Despite the loss of the transformation, opening with *Tommy* gave us another theatrical effect, one that I'd never guessed coming, despite listening to the album for nearly fifteen years: the presence of a singer in a rock show NOT singing for the ten first minutes. Although it's Daltrey's evening, he says or sings nothing, until "It's a Boy!" and the line "a son!" During the "Overture" he stands in front of the drum kit, banging some tambourines together as he was doing on the original tour, but letting the band and the arrangement take center stage.

Musically, the show delivers the promised reconstruction of *Tommy*. At first this approach is a revelation: I may have seen The Who a few times, but never heard their songs with such crystal clear vocal harmonies or rigorous attention to detail. All guitar parts are played *exactly* as they appear on the album, acoustic or electric. The drummer is reconstructing every drum beat laid down by Keith Moon forty years ago. The horns and sound effects are played by the keyboard player and for the first time, we get to hear every song bar one in the running order from the album.

This means that there are a couple of songs rarely played by the original band that gets an airing. "Cousin Kevin" is great and it's wonderful to hear Daltrey singing Entwistle material.

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

"Sally Simpson" is another one not often played¹⁰⁴, that chugs along fine, finding its place in the story when Tommy the character has woken up and is a pinball hero. The revelation, and for me the definitive highlight of the evening as the *Tommy* – segment is concerned, is "Welcome" a song often dropped from the original band's renditions of the album as it perhaps was a bit too slow coming at the end of the album, squeezed in before "Tommy's Holiday Camp" and the glorious finale of "We're Not Gonna Take It". On the album too, the song feels misplaced and awkward, with an arrangement that never jumps out of the speakers.

Tonight the song becomes a nice, sober pop song. It too features the baroque musical elements discussed in the music section, but in this song, these are slower and played down. It's in short one of the few songs on this album that takes time to stop and breathe. In that sense, it's position as the last but one song on the album is absolutely perfect, as it gives the audience a chance to catch breath before the big finale.

This is something that I wouldn't have thought about hadn't it been for me attending this show. I also discovered that I had previously been so put off by its slow start on the album that I'd missed that it actually contains some of the same musical drama techniques used in "Christmas". Unfortunately, they're not used to portray different characters, and so the song doesn't produce any drama the way it could have. I guess it's part of the "thrown together" element of the album, where the ideas are not fully hunted down and where one thing that works in one song is not working in the other.

Having said that, I couldn't get shake the feeling that by presenting *Tommy* this way, Daltrey had pushed the performance of *Tommy* into another dimension of rock performance. In all of the above segments about the show, it's clear that this was a show drenched in symbolism. There were few if any gestures, songs, symbols, arrangements, vocal parts that was supposed to represent just itself. *Every* hit on a drum was pointing back to the album, reminding us of how the album sounds. It had become rock theatre, perhaps not a just replica of the old ritual, but perhaps being a replica and, at the same time, a new step in the evolution of the old ritual?

This is a thoroughly new take on *Tommy*. The performance is exploring a new direction of authenticity with this version: They are playing a replication of something that never truly was band-wise. Personally, and I think many agrees with me, I feel that the original album,

¹⁰⁴ The «Join Together» live album from 1989 contains a fantastic version of it.

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despite its playfulness, variation and right out greatness, is a little "constrained" as a rock album. The Who were a lot of things, but a disciplined band they were not. In their catalog *Tommy* represents the odd album out where the band sound never got to tape. This is what Daltreys band are trying to replicate.

As a consequence the show never takes off during the *Tommy* section as were the album and arrangement is constrained, so is the band tonight. The musicians might be playing a legendary album from start to finish, but by doing so they are incapable of adding themselves in the mixture – they are perhaps a bit too professional? Or have they gotten lost in the idea of replicating every detail?

It's hard to pinpoint, and I feel a bit bad about being this sour about an evening I after all enjoyed. I guess my disappointment lies in somewhere between having all and none of my expectations met at the same time. I got the original *Tommy* but at the same time I got a replica of *Tommy* cemented in another context. But by playing it like this, they avoided any comparison to the original band, and ironically found their own platform of rock authenticity by doing *Tommy* like it had never been performed before, thus making it unique: Rock authenticity by avoiding rock authenticity.

Never the less, any Who fan's understanding and reading of the original album have all the versions and bootlegs described in the previous sections. Our expectations for any rendition of *Tommy*, or for that matter, *any* rock/pop album/song lies in the bands' ability to *explore* the music more than replicating it. This is what made the original tour so utterly exiting and it's also a widely held fact that it was through performing the songs of the album live that enabled Daltrey to find his voice for The Who.

And it's his voice that holds this back from just a cover evening. He is forty years older than he was when he first toured these songs and he elegantly manages to explore the songs with an older wiser voice. Some songs are transposed ("Christmas" is played in F instead of G) to accommodate his falling ambitus, but he hasn't lost his knack of giving the songs color and, above all character.

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

3.5 Go to The Mirror: Christmas as the center of drama

So far in this section, I've mapped the different layers of performance as described by Schechner¹⁰⁵; the performance, the theatre, the script, with one element left: The drama.

Live, the song comes in just at the right time. We've been introduced to the music, we've seen and heard *Tommy's* descent into himself, and the plot has gotten to a point where the overall performance needs something more. Where most other concept albums continue with standard songs, "Christmas" injects another dimension to the proceedings, the moment where Daltrey sings "See Me feel Me" in first person, thus all of a sudden inhabiting the *Tommy* character pulling the drama with the father character sung by Simon Townshend. The moment he enters *Tommy* the stage is lit in blue light as to further enhance the illusion of *Tommy's* underworld.

Simultaneously, the audience is slipping into their own performance spectrum letting themselves into their own meaning of the song, all of which is conducted by what is going on onstage. When *Tommy* materializes himself, we're not just there, we're there as him with him, going through the concert as a western culture rite of passage.

Through his inhabitation as *Tommy*, we are confronted with our us with a "Christmas" is the first song in which this happens (see my analysis in a previous chapter) and is a remarkable vehicle for this kind of theatrical use.

In this song as heard on the album we're presented with both rock and what sounds like baroque/classical drama music or opera. But it is only live that this becomes true drama as drama is dependent on space and time¹⁰⁶. If opera is an art form relying on musical drama, *Tommy*, in a live setting, delivers both rock and drama through rock: Rock Opera.

¹⁰⁵ Schechner p71

¹⁰⁶ Kerman 1988: 61

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

3.6 Tommy can you hear me: album/concert connections

There is at this point a need to gather and tie up some threads that have been cast around in the previous chapters. The task outlined at the beginning of this thesis suggested that the pop music is the basis of a modern form of theatre. From what I've revealed so far about the different incarnations of *Tommy*, this seems to be that case, but the *Tommy* pop score needs to connect the actual album with the performance event.

This is where the ritual theory adds the last dimension to *Tommy*. As it is outlined, the story and the music reflect the audience in the actual concert ritual doing. By which I mean that the audience, when entering a concert venue, enter a concrete "underworld", be it a small capacity venue or a large arena, the music reflect this this "entrance". As I can see it, this "entrance" takes place in the very first chord in the "Overture", the very first sound coming out of the speakers:

C – C/Bb – C/A – C/Ab – C/G – Gsus4 – Dsus4 – D – G

Tommy as a reflection of its audience then, is not holistic as in a particularly political charged way, rather it is holistic in a sense that the music and story of *Tommy* is a mythification of the band's early career and them playing in front of a young baby boomer audience some of which may have been Tommy's. This is where the album and the performance text meet in ritual theory: The album as a myth, describes the outline of a ritual, a doing which a later audience has picked up as a theatrical shaping and reinforcement of a cultural identity. In a modern world, this album communicates the discovery of oneself through the markers of music.

4.0 Smash the Mirror – *Tommy's* legacy debated

4.1 Sensation – rock opera?

So where does that leave this thesis? Having gone this far into the matter of *Tommy* and it's different incarnations I feel that I must somehow conclude and dispense my wisdom to the world of pop music studies, and later transport my findings into other areas of popular music studies/popular musicology. My approach to *Tommy* only has value once applied to other artists, songs or genres. Also, since this is a sort of a split thesis between music and theatre studies, I feel the pull to make establish a connection between *Tommy* and theatre studies. If the theatre/performance studies textual approach only works with *Tommy*, I've been the victim of a false positive. Thankfully, as the years have passed since work on this thesis began, the world of pop music has seen many examples of pop music being set and used in a performance context.

Concluding, as I did in the previous chapter, that *Tommy* is a rock opera is not really what I set out to do and doing so may seem unnecessary, but as genres in popular music are usually loosely applied, to find the opera fundament in rock opera was an absolute must for a further look into the mechanics of *Tommy*, and it's place in music and stage history.

An observant reader will perhaps remember that my initial task was to establish a relationship between *Tommy* and the opera genre. The way the question is posed points to an answer that lands in the field of theater studies, as it suggest that, if *Tommy* is part of the opera history, then the performance history of opera and our understanding of opera must be broadened and redefined.

On the surface of it one could easily argue that *Tommy* belongs in the opera history on the basis of using the word opera and the genre debate arising from it as discussed earlier. But that would be too simple to counter argue, and as such, only works when taken in relation to the fact that the album really does contain wholly dramatic music as demonstrated in the musical analysis. On that basis, one can safely argue that *Tommy* belong in the opera history and ongoing genre evolution as a work *containing* opera, teleporting opera into another genre. In short, *Tommy* re – contextualized the use of dramatic music, in the sense that it's not an

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absolute must to have a big orchestra or classically trained singers in order to produce dramatic music.

Taken as a parody of opera, *Tommy* also serves as a work that comes in the footsteps of Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Three Penny Opera*, both in the how the music is written and performed but most importantly in the re-contextualization of opera for popular music

It also represents the opera as an example of a dramatic work finding a large audience outside the opera world, thus demonstrating the popularity and commercial potential in dramatic music when attached to a popular music genre such as rock (or pop) was in the late sixties. On the other side, it clearly demonstrated how two seemingly opposite music genres could be brought together in a bigger whole. This thought, is discussing the meta-narrative consequences of the genre mash up. The drama lies in a live setting and it's probably here that the answer to my question lies.

Tommy demonstrated elegantly that opera is a stage art theory and that the genre opera must be understood and analyzed from that, rather than being in the way of further developing staged dramatic music. Here, I'm back in the Norwegian Opera. *Tommy* could easily be fitted into the season repertoire as a healthy alternative to the traditional productions of opera, and I'm convinced it would have done great at the box office.

4.2 Miracle Cure – the rock stage art

As for its placing in rock history, Dave Marsh's chapters concerning the album take an interesting turn in the genre debate when he claims that is not a question "...whether *Tommy* is an opera per se. (It obviously isn't, though it isn't a cantata either). The issue is whether Townshend had written (or the Who were performing) a new form, whether one wished to term it rock opera or rock cantata or spiritual situation comedy¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Marsh 1983: 341.

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Marsh, intentionally or not, is drawing long lines, but by doing so he helps transporting *Tommy* into performance history. As mentioned in the chapter concerning theatre studies, the arch in the theatre studies texts and theories has been a desire to analyze, explore and establish theatre as an arena for an independent language, a language not contained or inhibited by spoken or written language. Reading Hamlet is not the same as being present at a performance of Hamlet on the basis that what you read is only the written words to an action meant to be played out in performance with an audience¹⁰⁸

In relation to this, and seen from the perspective of theatre studies, the original album is a script, the one element that can be transported from performance to performance, the map that instructs both stage and audience in the performance, just like a transcript of a Shakespeare play.

Seen in this light, *Tommy* can be seen as a vehicle for a brand new rock stage language that broke away from the standard song by song format previously performed by rock groups. The meta-narrative of rebellion and representing their generation augmented with a solid but open-vessel narrative, they filled a need in the baby-boomer demography for a new stage language, used as a mirror for the construction of generation identity.

4.3 Sally Simpson – music legacy

Musically *Tommy's* legacy is that it opened for pop writers to be more adventurous in the pop format without being looked at as going outside of their limitations as writers. After *Tommy*, having a bit of classical training showing up in your songwriting was not unusual, neither was the presence of more complex song structures based on songs like "Christmas". "Bohemian Rhapsody"¹⁰⁹ is by far the most famous and popular of the songs coming in the wake of *Tommy* and also deserves special mention because unlike "Christmas" and its failure to travel

¹⁰⁸ The concept of «action» in pop songs is discussed in the music analysis chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Queen (1981): *Greatest Hits*, CDP 7 46033 2 EMI Records Ltd

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further into our cultural memory beyond being a plot carrying song on *Tommy*, "Bohemian Rhapsody" feels complete and is without a doubt Queens finest minutes of pop indulgence.

Other artist would also find that adding a bit of dramatic spice and tension was the key to success. I never get tired of hearing Meat Loaf's "Paradise by the Dashboard Light"¹¹⁰ when the girl goes "stop right there!" It's still the same song but it shifts focus and the following "discussion" in the song is a textbook demonstration of rock opera writing.

The biggest influence *Tommy* can claim is the invention of the rock arena anthem. It does not owe that much to "Christmas" but takes its inspiration from the aforementioned into of "Pinball Wizard". Where "Christmas" and the dramatic elements move fast, in this song, the different sections are set up more slowly and in anticipation to one another. Live, the "Pinball Wizard" intro grabbed the ears of the audience and worked perfectly in synchronization with the attention span of a large audience. For their next album, the anthem was further developed with "Baba o Rily" as the prime example of a simple chord structure used to maximum effect. The synth intro may be great to hear on record, but live it makes the audience prepare for the song.

The anthem is probably what has survived from *Tommy*, and having a long introduction to your song is now standard for most bands working live. The most extreme example I can think of is U2's long soundscape that anticipates the echoed guitar that is the foundation of "Where The Streets Have No Name" from their breakthrough album *The Joshua Tree*¹¹¹. This clearly suggests that the live event *shapes* the songwriting.

4.4 I'm Free – the popular music/performance studies marriage

At the very start and throughout the thesis I claimed that it is through pop music and pop music performance that we find the theatre of today. Judging from what I have presented in this thesis, I would say that this claim still holds its ground pretty well as an overreaching arch

¹¹⁰ Meat Loaf (1977): *Bat Out Of Hell*, 01-463044-10, Epic, Sony Music Entertainment

¹¹¹ U2 (1987): *The Joshua Tree*, 842 298-2 Island Records Ltd

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in pop music. That is off course, not to say that all pop or rock music is opera, but just like opera being a sub-genre of theatre, the rock opera is a sub - genre of pop theatre.

In this context I use the word theatre disconnected from the usual connotation of spoken language and plot, instead flying it into the pop music world to become a word describing the different layers of performance as discussed in the theatre chapter. By adopting pop music under the wings of theatre studies we can apply many some of the theories in theatre studies to the performance of pop music, like I've done with Tommy and the myth/ritual theory framework.

I must stress, that the popular music studies/performance studies merging is not yet fully developed and that the myth/ritual theory application is only one approach, but it is no less a start to a work that needs to be done and excavated.

As many writers on pop music have pointed out, pop music isn't just music, and in a performance reading of pop music the pop music serves as vessels for characters performed that is identified by audiences as a reflection of their own definition of identity. The performance and performers holds up a mirror to the audience.

It would be tempting to say that through the pop stage art, Artaud, Grotowski, Brooks, Nygaard, Brecht and all the other great theorists of the theatre, got what they were looking for. Whether or not that is the case, I'll leave for others to investigate, but I will go on record saying that pop music has produced great characterized stage art that easily falls under the theatre banner. In the discipline of popular music studies, a Brechtian take on Lady Gaga or an Artaud /theatre of the grotesque framework on black metal would be very welcomed as it would open up the popular music studies especially when used in reference to the sound box, as it is already a theatrical take on recorded sound.

4.5 Welcome - the new fields of study

Following the previous argument, his thesis also suggests a development of the contextual framework in which the pop theatre is being studied, namely the live event. My dissection of

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the various incarnations of *Tommy* has showed how our understanding and reading of the work has changed in parallel with the changes in how it's been staged. This of course, only counts for one reading of the live event and I hope that this thesis opens up for others to further investigate reading of live pop events.

Doing so demands a decision about whether or not popular music studies encompass the live pop event as an object of study. Up until recent, the understanding of pop history suggested that pop's main media vessel and thus main object of academic study, was the recorded song. As of 2011 this is changing as the decrease in record sales and the flourishing of music festivals and live events as the pop audience main focus as consumers, suggests a new need in popular music studies for writing about and analyzing live pop events.

The "decision" could be based on a simple yet demanding question that in some ways sums the contents of this thesis: is the artists' media vessel the recorded song or the live event? In many cases, such as with The Who, the answer is both. We are in other words looking at not two separate lines of histories, live and the recorded history. In merging popular music studies with theatre/performance studies, we are in fact looking into one history, in which popular music takes up space as a music and performance medium.

I can honestly say that learning about theatre and performance theory profoundly changed my academic life, and in a way, changed my life, as music eats up a lot of energy and time in my daily life. It changed the way I looked at my record collection and the way I wrote and performed songs

4.6 Tommys holiday camp – Plato's Cave?

What I've discovered throughout was that my records were just that: records. The word "records" imply storage of information - information in the form of music that can be put together to form a narrative in a live setting. In the above ritual reading of the concert I have argued that the album of *Tommy* represents a script of a performance, the element that can be transported from one performance to the next and that the song "Christmas" contains elements that will create drama in a live setting. Listening to the album, however enjoyable and fun, is

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in this context like sitting in Plato's cave: the listener is only being presented with the idea of *Tommy*, the idea of drama and the shadow of something bigger that is going on in the real live setting.

The pop records changes and develop the live events, and the live events changes and develop the pop record. It's a pop music machine impossible to switch off and a machine that begs to be observed by popular music studies.

5.0 We're not Gonna Take it – Final thoughts

A couple of directions with this material are not fully developed by this thesis. *Tommy* and its relationship with the stage musical ended up being too big for this format and I urge future popular music scholars to finish that relay. It would be of great interest in the combination of popular music and theatre/performing studies.

Also, the Ken Russel movie needs further analysis in its relationship to the narrative music on *Tommy*. An audio/visual analysis of this movie, and a contextualization to British and American meta - musical movies is a Pandora's Box of opportunities for popular music studies. Both of these elements ended up left out of the thesis as I chose to focus on the underdeveloped rock stage art (in itself a label worth investigating) and how one can approach the rock concert both in term of performance studies and popular music studies.

Ironically, by digging into the matters of rock opera I have, as one can read from the various sections, still no solid grasp on what rock opera is, which brings me to suggest that that's probably the very reason we're still intrigued by it. After more than forty years we have no clear definition, no direction and no understanding of what rock opera should be. Here, as argued before, lies the clue to the fascination: it's still an open vessel.

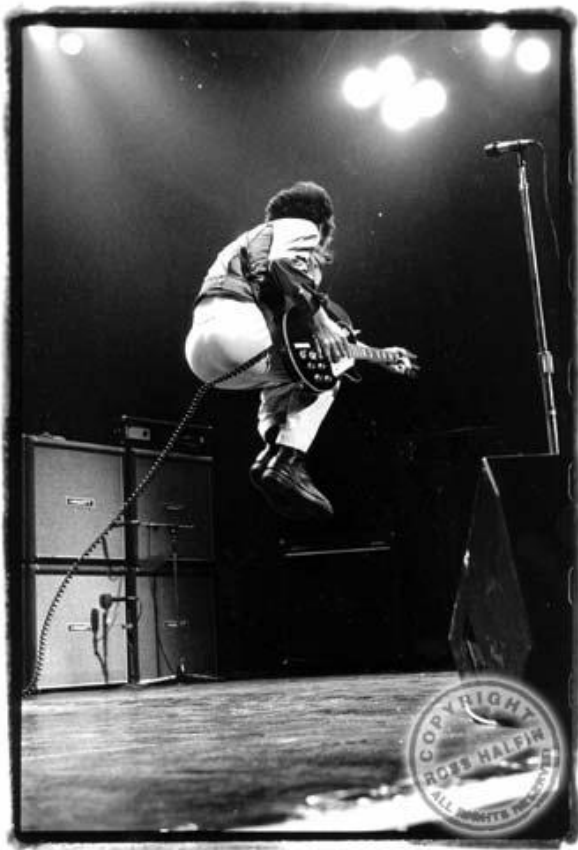
It could be that the hijacking of rock by the stage musical has prevented rock from trying to explore the narrative in its body of work, but it could also be that *Tommy* set a standard so

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high it has been impossible to follow. Not even Pete Townshend and The Who themselves managed to follow it. All projects following *Tommy* had some kind of narrative behind them, but lacked that one thing that glued *Tommy* together so well: the characterization and drama through musical events. The lack of a thorough understanding as to how dramatic music is produced is what has sunk almost every attempt at writing rock opera after *Tommy*, the ones by Townshend himself included, which to me is a great mystery.

Again it could be that rock opera end up sounding too close to the staged musical, and that by incorporating drama in songs, you ultimately end up no longer sounding like a rock band. The Who's triumph on *Tommy* is that, for all dramatic use of music, they managed to represent both parent genres: OPERA and ROCK.

Rock opera isn't rock and opera haphazardly thrown together, rather *one* genre, bigger than the sum of its parent genres. In terms of authenticity it is a *real* genre: Rock opera is rock opera.



Pete in late seventies, Shepperton studios.

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

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Young, Neil with Crazy Horse (2003): *Greendale*, 9362-48533-2 Reprise Records

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Live shows

AHA, Oslo Konserthus 2010, *Hunting High and Low/Scoundrel Days Live*

Neil Young, Oslo Konserthus 2003, *Greendale Solo Acoustic Tour*

Roger Waters, Fornebu 2010 *The Wall Live*

ZZTop/Doobie Brothers, Oslo Spectrum 2010

"Quiet please, it's a bloody opera!"

with The Who:

Oslo Spectrum, Oslo 1996 *Quadrophenia Tour*

Irwine Meadows, Orange County CA 2000, *Greatest Hits Tour*

Tinley Park, Chicago IL 2002, *Greatest Hits Tour*

Royal Albert Hall, London England 2004, *Teenage Cancer Trust*

O2 Festival, Hereford House, Leeds, England 2006, *Endless Wire World Tour*

Quart Festival, Kristiansand, Norway 2007, *Endless Wire World Tour*

Roskilde Festival, Roskilde 2007, *Endless Wire World Tour*

Indigo2, London, England 2008, *Greatest Hits Tour*

Royal Albert Hall, London, England 2010 *Teenage Cancer Trust* performing *Quadrophenia*

With Roger Daltrey:

Royal Albert Hall, London England 2011, *Teenage Cancer Trust* performing *Tommy*